GETTING THERE: ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS PRIOR TO ENTRY TO HIGHER EDUCATION.

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Abstract

Getting there: aspects of the experiences of students prior to entry to higher education.

This study set out to explore issues surrounding the extent to which growth and change in higher education has been accompanied by diversification of student characteristics and experiences prior to entry to higher education. Exploration of these issues developed further into a consideration of factors influencing entry to higher education.

To facilitate exploration of student characteristics and experiences two research approaches were employed in the study:

- a questionnaire to a cohort of 252, first year students, attending three full time education courses in a higher education establishment (the quantitative element)

- eight focus groups of students drawn from school sixth forms and Access courses in a college of further education (the qualitative element)

The results of the study demonstrate diversity of student characteristics and prior experiences. Consideration of educational experience, for example, shows that students enter higher education via a variety of routes such that the former recognition of 'traditional', 'vocational' and "Access' routes underestimates the diversity of student prior educational and other life experiences.

A model of influences surrounding entry to higher education was developed from the literature and in testing this against the study results two interacting factors emerged as particularly significant. Social class, as a student characteristic, was found to interact with the development, via prior experiences in the home, of a positive perspective towards education. Results obtained from both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study demonstrated the significance of parental knowledge of the education system and their perspective towards education on the educational progress of their offspring. Four categories of parental educational perspective were isolated: supportive and knowledgeable, supportive and lacking in knowledge, disinterested and negative.

Social class and a positive educational perspective in interaction were found to influence the likelihood that a student would stay in the education system beyond school leaving and return to education in later life. A positive predisposition towards education was supported by high expectations of the higher education experience and its outcomes in encouraging applicants.

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Contents

Appendices (following page 188)

1	Ethnic origin and entry to higher education
2	Student Experience Questionnaire
3	Pilot study
4	Copy OHP transparency for presentation to students at data gathering
5	Copy OHP transparency 'completing an OMR form. Used at data gathering
6a	Preparation for schools interviews
6b	Information for schools
7a	Access focus group interviews, 'seating plans'.
7b	Schools focus group interviews 'seating plans'
8	Time taken to acquire qualifications for entry to higher education
9	Sources of advice, information and influences
10	Finance
11	Choice of higher education institution
12	Discrimination in employment
13	Accommodation
14	'Thumbnail biographies'

Preface.

This study was initiated by the School of Education in the university. A perception of changes in the entry characteristics of the student body led to a recognition of the need for more detailed information than was at that time available. More information was desired on where students came from, what experiences they carried with them and what perceptions about higher education they brought with them. The researcher brought to the study observations of applicants to higher education based on experiences gained as a lecturer and manager in further education.

Two elements of the researcher's work in FE were particularly relevant to the study. First, the researcher had responsibility for student services across a community college: the provision of support, information, advice, guidance and counselling for students and prospective students. This involved interviewing students on a variety of issues both at the commencement and during their courses, thus providing some insights into student past experience, present situations and future aspirations.

Second, and more directly related to this study, the work involved a responsibility for processing all applications to HE from one college. This generated an awareness of the diversity of characteristics and different 'biographies' to be found among applicants. Of particular interest was an awareness of a number of different 'routes' into HE followed by students. In addition to the 'traditional', young, A-level applicant there were students following BTEC courses, students applying from construction and engineering departments following the completion of OND and ONC courses, applicants from Access courses, a small number of students who had been following nursery nursing courses who applied for teacher training, as well as 'mature' or 'adult' students who had followed A-level or BTEC courses on a part-time day and/or evening basis. Discussions with 'mature' students, both formal, and more often informal, on the various issues which brought them to student services, suggested that the students may have spent some time in obtaining qualifications for entry to higher education and used different parts of the education system during this process.

A general recognition of the diversity to be found among the applicants gave rise to a number of further observations. First, that the student population of higher education institutions was changing. Second, many of the 'new' students had a greater range of 'life experiences' than the 'traditional student' in terms of aspects such as experience of work and of unemployment, and of family commitments. Third, observations drawn from interviews with students on various matters, data on the completed application forms, including the 'personal statement', and discussion of the forms with students, suggested that the various 'routes' followed by students interrelated with their characteristics and prior experiences. Fourth, observations, again drawn from personal experience, indicated that there were

factors which hindered or supported the development of the educational careers of students. Examples included the support of families and spouses, and finance. Taken together these common-sense observations presented a complex picture of interacting factors which were affecting applicants to higher education.

The observations were initially fragmented, incomplete and uncoordinated. They were regarded as a by-product of work and concerned mainly with the differences between 'mature' and 'young' students. Such anecdotal evidence, and journal and newspaper articles, read in relation to work, suggested that there were issues worthy of exploration. Broadly stated, observation suggested that students entering higher education were using a wider variety of educational routes and had a greater diversity of characteristics and experiences than might have been the case in the past.

Brought together, these two areas of concern, personal observation and the university's desire for more informed analysis, resulted in a study of student experience prior to entry to higher education. The study has therefore in essence been 'data' led; concerned with the empirical exploration of observed phenomena rather than generated out of a theoretical formulation. Theory has been used as a framework for clarifying areas of research and for facilitating interpretation and understanding of results. This study offered the opportunity to attempt to clarify, isolate, expand upon, and explore empirically some of the issues identified above. These issues are set out and discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

Chapter One.The study in context, issues and the study structure.

In this chapter the main argument of the study is presented, the study is placed in context, issues are stated and the study structure is outlined. The study set out to explore issues, as opposed to attempting to answer a question, test a hypothesis or solve a problem (Bassey. M. 1991. 2.2). It is argued that growth and change in higher education, accompanied by increased diversity of student characteristics, has made it increasingly difficult to state with confidence what a typical student in higher education 'is like', where they came from and what factors influenced their application. This diversity is explored in the study. The results suggest considerable diversity among students in characteristics, prior experiences and routes of entry to higher education. Underlying this diversity, however, are two inter-related similarities: social class background and a positive 'perspective' towards education which, in interaction, not only encourage students to stay in education after school leaving but to return to education in dealing with change and in meeting perceived needs in later life.

At the extremes, two views of entry to higher education might be adopted. Entry is voluntary and competitive and might therefore be seen as the outcome of individual agency, individual effort and decision-making. Alternatively higher education stands at the apex of the education system and entry might be seen as the product of social selection. The former places the emphasis on human agency and the latter on social structure. Neither view interacts sufficiently with the effects of social contexts, often small scale, for example, at home and in school, within which the prospective student interacts with others before entering higher education and which might enhance or constrain application. "Transcendental realism" (Bhaskar 1979) offers a theoretical framework which takes account of agency and structure and also small scale social interaction, all three of which, it is argued, are involved in the process of entry in to higher education.

Context, characteristics and prior experiences.

Evidence provided in Chapter 2 sets the study in the context of a generalised pattern of accelerating growth, change and diversity in higher education particularly since the 1970s. Though varying in extent dependent upon institution, course and former 'sector' of the system, the overall pattern also indicates increasing diversity in student characteristics such as an increase in the number of women, of 'mature' students, and increased representation of ethnic minorities. Little change in the representation of social class is indicated.

Change in characteristics implies change in prior experience since these interact. Being female, for example, or belonging to social class V, or being Asian, or belonging to a particular age group represent both statistical categories and group and individual experiences. In the past it was reasonable to make assumptions concerning the prior experiences of the 'typical' student in higher education. For

example, in the immediate 'post Robbins era' the typical student was white, most likely to be male, middle class and entering university directly from school, post A-levels, to study a full-time course, away from home (McNay 1994 p.169) This, the 'traditional' student, though increasingly more likely to be female, has, over time, become one category among a diversity, and the prior experiences of students might be expected to have diversified accordingly.

The study structure.

The study structure is presented in Figure 1.1(p.3) overleaf. The elements of the structure are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The following offers an overview. Figure 1.1 illustrates that the study drew out three issues, took a theoretical stance based on an understanding of 'realism' (Bhaskar 1979 and Miles and Huberman 1994) and employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The literature search and the findings from both empirical methods provide ongoing triangulation in the presentation of the results and analysis.

Accepting the size and complexity of the relationship between prior experiences, student characteristics and university entrance the study was devised around three issues drawn from the literature search (Chapter 2), the observations of the researcher and discussion with university staff (see Preface). These issues are:

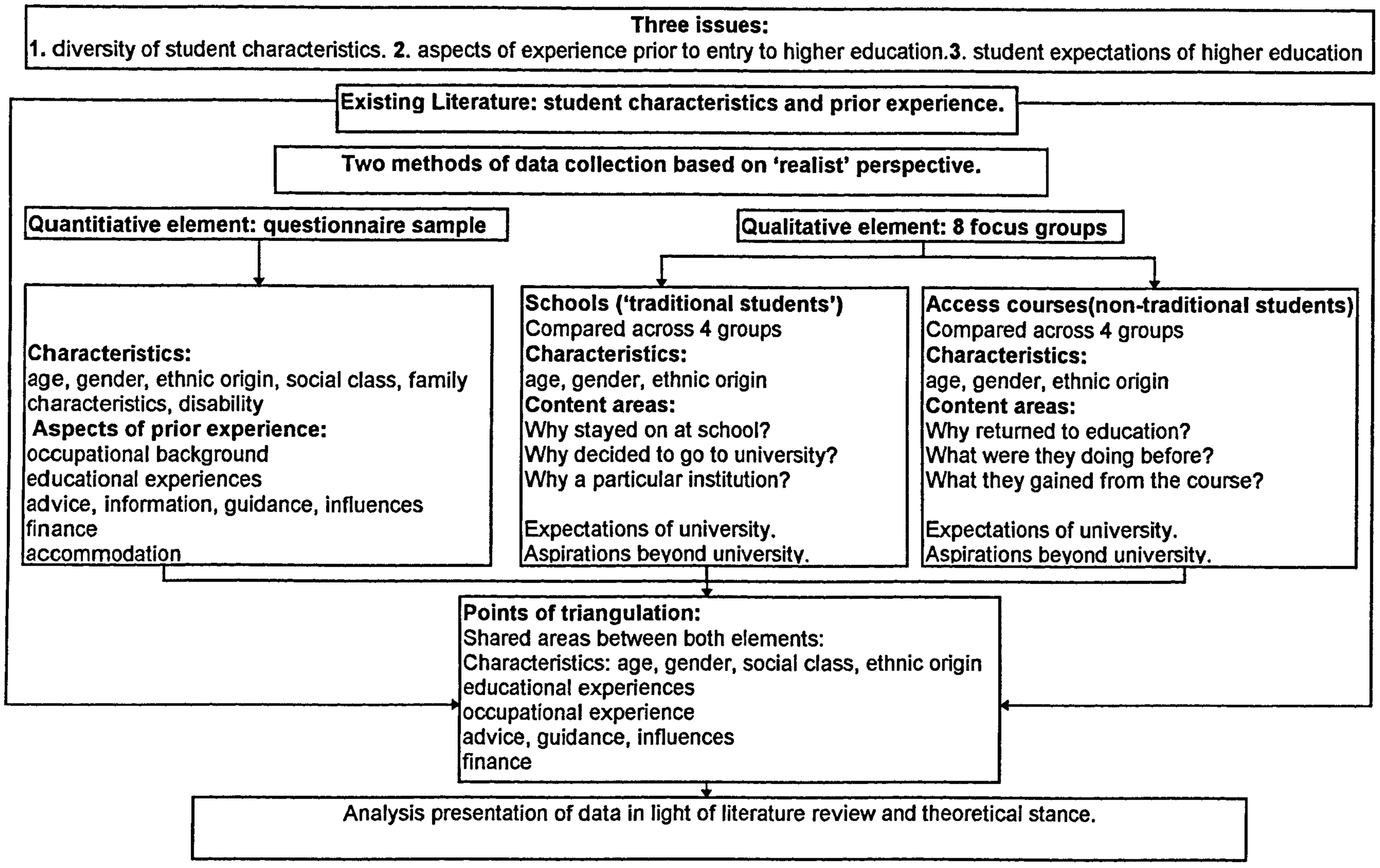
1. the diversity of student characteristics;
2. relevant aspects of experience prior to entry to higher education, including the education routes followed to gain entry; and
3. student expectations of higher education.

The means of exploring these issues, the empirical element of the study, employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies based on the argument that exploration of characteristics and exploration of experiences require different kinds of questions. Characteristics may be studied by asking questions such as 'what' and 'how many', the answers to which can be expressed in numerical terms, while the study of experiences (and reflections on experiences) demands a qualitative approach. The empirical element of the study therefore comprised the collection and analysis of data from:

- a cohort of 252, first year, students attending three full-time education courses in a higher education institution using a questionnaire (the qualitative element); and
- eight groups of students, 4 drawn from school sixth forms and 4 from Access courses in a college of further education, using a focus group approach (the qualitative element).

Points of triangulation were developed in the form of 'shared areas' drawn from the findings of both empirical elements, together with the findings from the

Figure 1.1 Study structure and content: schematic representation.



literature search. Triangulation is developed as an ongoing element in the presentation of the results and in discussion and analysis.

Education routes and factors surrounding entry to higher education.

Requirements for entry to higher education are expressed predominantly, though not exclusively, in the form of 'paper' qualifications recognised by the institutions and their constituent courses. Qualifications represent the outcomes of learning experiences obtained not only in schools but also, via various modes of attendance, in further education and via distance learning. GCSE and A-levels, for example, together with a diversity of vocational qualifications, are available via all of these alternatives. Access courses have been added more recently.

Qualifications are valid in their own right, for example, for access to employment, and may also facilitate progress through the 'levels' of the education system and ultimately into higher education. Accepted theory suggests three routes leading to the point of entry to higher education, 'traditional', 'vocational' and 'Access' but the experiences of the researcher, discussion with university staff and the literature search indicated a more complex situation which is supported in the study findings. Analysis of the questionnaire results shows that students in the questionnaire sample entered university via 8 routes and 1 variation on a route (Group J being a variation on direct entry) as represented in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1. Education routes.

Route A	Students who entered university directly after leaving school
Route B	Students who left school, went to FE and then directly to university
Route C	Students who transferred into FE from the 6th form (with or without completing their course) then went directly to university
Route D	Students who entered university via an Access course
Route E	Students who gained university entrance qualifications through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: evening, part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc...
Route F	Students who entered university via a vocational route i.e. those who gained vocational qualifications which were acceptable for university entrance as part of their training for a form of employment
Route G	Students who had been in the higher education system prior to their current course. For example, those who had a degree or degree equivalent qualification or who may have commenced a course which they did not complete
Route H	Students who obtained the qualifications necessary for university entrance during their school career(or equivalent FE programme), left the education system and entered university at a later date. In the meantime they had no contact with the education system
Route J	Students in the under 20 age group who, in effect, followed Route A but were involved in other activities before starting their university career

This pattern of routes was obtained by 'tracing' individual responses through the questionnaire items and collating them together. Each group therefore represents a collation of individual 'educational biographies'. It is argued that the selection

made by a specified student of an education programme (not always necessarily leading to a qualification), including institution and mode of attendance, is influenced by the availability, or perceived availability, of their selection in interaction with other facets of the students life, their perceived needs at a particular point in time, their knowledge of the alternatives available to them and the support they receive from significant others in their lives. An individual 'educational biography', as demonstrated in the findings, develops over-time as the life circumstances and perceived needs of the student change and are responded to in educational terms.

A visual representation of the influences operating upon the individual in the development of an educational biography is presented in the model (Figure 1.2 p.7). The model is comprised (after Bhaskar 1979) of three elements:

- the individual student;
- small scale interaction in a variety of settings, first, those surrounding the individual, (for example, home and school), and second, those influencing, or attempting to influence decision making in structures (interest and pressure groups); and
- social structures in the form of the higher education system and its institutions interacting with national policies.

The right hand side of the model outlines some of the structural factors influencing entry to higher education. These are not the primary concern of the study but provide its context. The probability of entry for a potential student will be affected by the number of places on offer and the resources provided in the system as a whole, usually decided at national level. Decision-making at this level may be influenced by interest and pressure groups, for example, by those attempting to develop increased opportunities for adults. National policies are then interpreted by individual institutions in terms of the study programmes offered and in their admissions procedures which again influence the number of places on offer and entry requirements.

The left hand side of the model is concerned with the individual student, her/his characteristics and experiences and the interaction between these. Characteristics include 'structural variables' (Layder et al 1991 p.449) over which the individual has little, if any, control: age, gender and ethnic origin, to which may be added parental social class.

Three areas of prior experiences were isolated from the literature search for further exploration in the empirical element of the study:

- educational experiences, including forms of education, for example, school, FE, and distance learning, and social interaction within these;
- the social milieu in which the student operates; including home and family and peer groups;

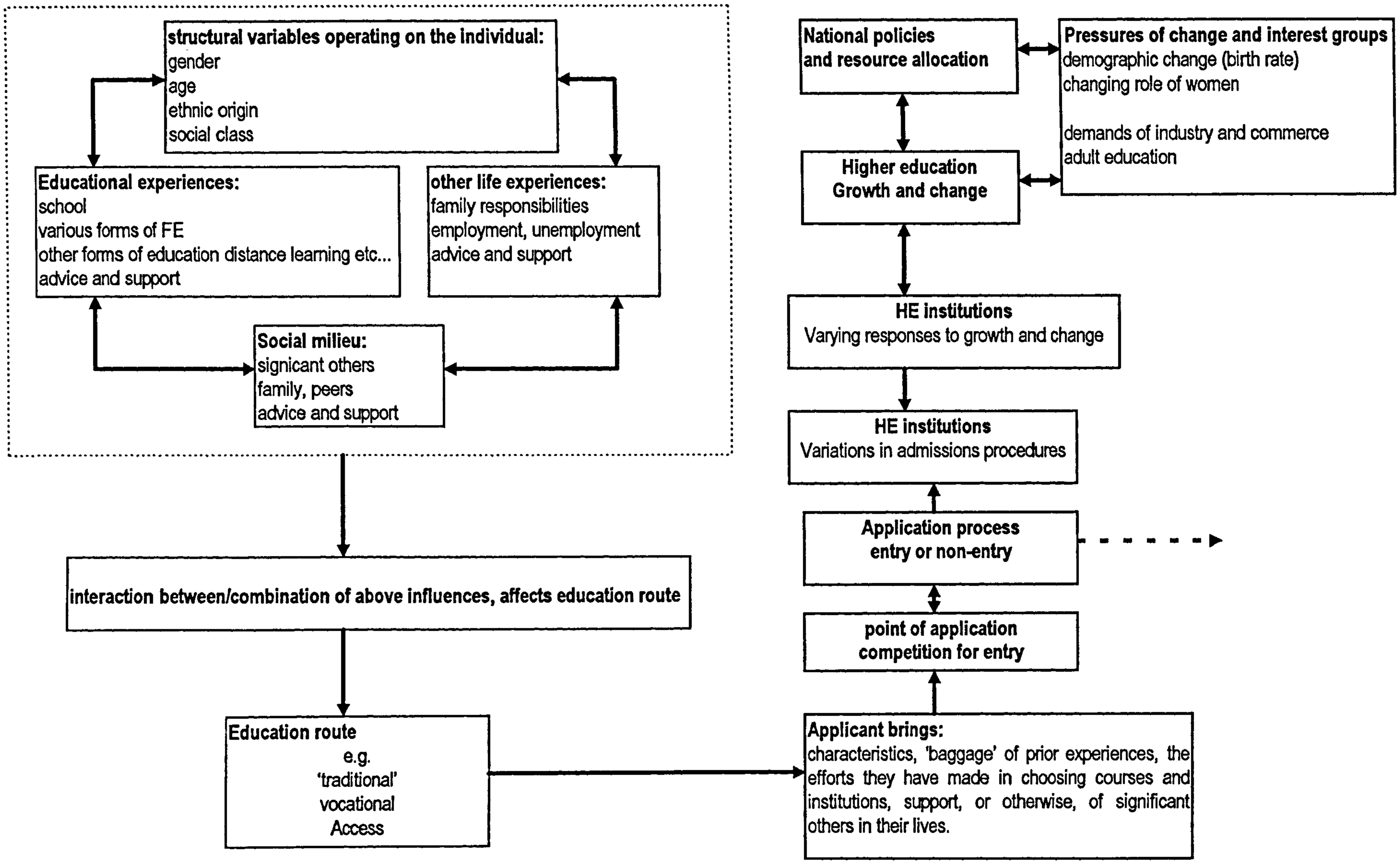
- other life experiences, for example, employment, unemployment and the influence of family responsibilities.

The interaction between these aspects of prior experience and student characteristics leads to the formulation of the educational biographies represented in the routes. For example, 'adult' students are shown to have followed a number of varied alternatives in response to, for example, their employment needs (including unemployment), perceived need for 'personal development' and the demands of adult life. These needs will have affected not only the type of course followed but also institution and mode of attendance. A decision to enter higher education is also influenced by what students hope to gain as a result.

It is argued that the routes constitute an educational representation of educational 'plans' formulated by the students, consciously or unconsciously, in response to life changes, either externally imposed or arising out of perceived need. In effect the operation of human agency constrained and/or enabled by structural factors and operation in small scale interaction.

The following three chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) present the literature search, an expansion of the theoretical framework and the method applied in the study.

Figure 1.2 A model of factors surrounding entry to higher education.



Chapter 2. The development of key aspects of diversity.

This chapter places this study in the context of higher education. An exhaustive analysis of policy formulation, of structural and economic change, and the extensive debates which continue to surround these, is not attempted here. These aspects are not the focus of the study and are dealt with only as contextual factors. These aspects are dealt with only as contextual factors relevant to the study. The chapter opens with a brief historical account of the growth in student numbers in higher education and then reviews student characteristics in sections. Interaction between these is indicated in the text and discussed in the summary to this chapter. Finally the significance of diversity is considered together with some attitudes towards higher education which may influence prospective applicants.

Some student characteristics are 'structural variables' in the sense that the individuals involved have no opportunity of exercising control over them (Layder et al 1991 p.449). These structural variables include age, social class of parents, gender and race. Data are gathered by quantitative means and a large amount of information is available. Evidence of student experience, particularly drawn from qualitative studies, is generally less readily available. The literature recognises the centrality of students to the higher education project and discusses them and their needs but tends to talk about them rather than to them. (Haselgrove 1994 p. 4) It might be argued that there has been an imbalance in formulating education policy between the views of consumers, students, and the interests of academics, industry and government agencies (Roberts and Higgens 1992 p.3).

Jarman and Blackburn (1993 p.197) review growth in the numbers of students and variation in student characteristics in higher education between 1938 and 1990. In 1938 less than 2% of the relevant age group (18 year olds) was admitted to higher education; women less than 0.5%. Following World War II numbers entering university increased but demand from returning service men reached its peak in 1948 and there was a small decline over the next 5 years. By 1948 3.7% of 18 year olds were attending university.

During this period, following WW II, access was structured on gender and class lines: men outnumbered women by 3:1 (Jarman and Blackburn ibid p. 198) while between 1928 and 1947 estimates suggest that 8.9% of all boys from non-manual backgrounds attended university compared with 1.4% of all boys from manual working backgrounds. Student prior experience at this time can be largely assumed. The majority of the students were white males from middle class backgrounds, entering university directly from school. This pattern continued up to 1954. Jarman and Blackburn (ibid 1993 p.197) find that:

> "Although there was an increase in the ratio of places per person, it appears that none of the gains went to the working class, and the differences between top and bottom widened." (ibid 1993 p.198)
>
> "Those entering full-time university education may have constituted an academic elite but could hardly be regarded as representing the peak of ability in view of the strong social influences on the pattern of access." (ibid p.198)

From 1953 there was continuous growth in numbers among both men and women. This was supported by the Barlow Report 1946 and the Crowther Report 1959(Allen 1988 p.47). Expansion was stimulated from three sources: increased student demand, the need to improve industrial and technological training and the recognition that talent was being wasted. The awarding of generous grants to ex-service personnel was later developed by The Anderson Committee (1960) which introduced mandatory grants (and provided full fees) for everyone offered a place on a full-time course (Bell and Tight 1993 p.16). This reduced the effects of 'ability to pay' as an obstacle to university entrance.

The recommendations of the Robbins Report (1963) were more far-reaching in propounding the principle that a university education should be available to all of those with the ability and qualifications to benefit from a course. Expansion was achieved during the 1960s via the creation of new universities, conversion of existing colleges to universities (to 'Oxbridge' and 'traditional', 'Red Brick' were added the 'new' universities) and the expansion of intakes throughout the system. University entrants rose from 40,875 in 1963 to 61,201(a rise of 50%) 5 years later.(Blackburn and Jarman 1993 ibid p.199)

Growth in university entrance was already in progress before Robbins, but major growth in higher education provision outside the universities began following the Robbins Report. The Government White Paper (DES 1966) stated that:

> "The Government believes that the best results will be achieved by developing higher education on polytechnic lines wherever practicable."

The 'binary system' came into operation. Between 1950 and 1980 thirty polytechnics were established (Scott 1989 p.12). Circumstances favoured the polytechnics. Significant interest groups supported, or did not oppose, the development (apart from teacher education)and their designation met the wish of the DES for the creation of a "coherent and cheaper sector" of higher education (Bone 1992 p.40). The work of the polytechnics was to be comprehensive in range and character, encompassing sub-degree and part-time provision alongside full-time and sandwich courses and there was a remit to develop closer and direct links with industry business and the professions (Bone 1992 ibid p.42)

Major change began to occur during the 1970s. It became evident that a stabilisation in the participation rate among the 'traditional' student group was to be anticipated (Woodley et al 1977) and that if it continued the result would be a sharp fall in numbers in that age group from the mid 1980s onwards. (This situation was discussed in two DES documents, DES 1978, 1979 and updated in a Report DES 1984).

A second factor which began to emerge during the 1970s was a change in the climate in which the universities had operated. University expansion had followed the Second World War when the universities were in a strong autonomous position. The power of the university dons, already linked to the elite of the nation, was enhanced by scientific and social research. Developing out of autonomous institutions subsidised by the state, scholars and scientists "achieved unprecedented command over the academic agenda". The agenda rested on a firm liberal consensus, political and academic (Scott 1989 ibid p.9). During the 1970s this consensus began to break down. This resulted partly from economic factors, partly from the negative publicity which accrued to the universities during the 'student unrest' of the 1960s, but more significantly because higher education was perceived to have failed to deliver solutions to many social ills and needs as portrayed in the 1960s. (Allen 1988 p.470)

The Government White Paper 1972 (Education: a Framework for Expansion) proposed a ten year expansion of higher education, though with a reduced unit of resource (Bone 1992 ibid p.40). The expansion which was to be concentrated on non-university development, led to the closure of many colleges of education and the redesignation of many more. This followed the James Report (DES 1972) which concluded that teachers should be four year trained graduates. The polytechnics meanwhile, had explored, and continued to explore, 'new markets', and in recent years have been able to achieve growth without commensurate increase in resourcing while maintaining their initial remit to avoid becoming "quasi-universities". (Bone 1992 ibid p.41) Under the terms of the Education Reform Act polytechnics became self-governing institutions with the financial status of higher education corporations. They later received the right to designate themselves universities which they became from 1993 onwards. The students in the quantitative element of this study entered the institution as members of its first student body as a university.

In 1981 (Allen 1988 ibid p.47) Government announced that it intended to substantially reduce spending on universities. Between 1981 and 1987 a number of reports were produced (for example, The Leverhulme Inquiry 1983, Government Green Paper 1985, The Jarrett Report 1985, Government White Paper 1987, Education Reform Act 1987) which examined higher education and produced a number of 'themes' for change. These themes included wider access on the grounds of increased social justice and economic efficiency, more professional management to improve efficiency including the introduction of strategic plans and

mission statements, greater accountability and centralised policy making with a clear understanding of aims, both for teaching and research.

The Government White Paper of April 1987 and the Education Reform Bill of November of the same year were significantly far reaching (Allen 1988 ibid p.42). The Reform Bill required a higher education system with increased accountability, which served the needs of the economy more closely, which had closer links with industry and commerce and which would promote enterprise. The government intended to fund research more effectively and to secure better teaching through staff development and appraisal.

Performance indicators were to be applied and the Universities Funding Council was to be established to fund universities through contracts. Contracts were intended to define what was required of universities and to establish closer links between future funding and past performance. The Government intended to determine the direction in which it wanted higher education to develop and that policy would be imposed through funding (Allen 1988 ibid p.48). The shift of power from the universities towards central control was seen by some as "shocking" and an unacceptable level of state control but others questioned why it had taken government so long to dictate how its money was to be spent (Allen p.49). Expansion continued. By 1989 there had been a rise in full-time numbers to 102,695 (150% over 20 years) (Blackburn and Jarman 1993 ibid p.199)

The possible effects of these relatively rapid and far reaching changes have been and, continue to be, the subject of considerable debate. Involvement in, or further consideration, of this debate falls outside the needs of this study but some summary is necessary to place the study in the context of the debate. This is provided by Barnett (1992 p.85). In discussing quality in higher education he argues that the changes which have occurred and the debate surrounding them have led to a number of shifts in emphasis:

- a shift from a system which catered for the needs of the traditional student enjoyed by a few to one in which a larger proportion of the population participates and to which an even larger proportion now feels it has claims;
- a shift from a system which has essentially been a part of the cultural apparatus of society to one which is more a part of the economic apparatus, so relegating the finishing school element as it has become a force of production in its own right;
- a shift from higher education being a personal and positional good to having a general social value;
- a shift from higher education being valued for its intrinsic properties to its being an instrumental good, especially for economic survival amidst expanding world markets;
- a shift from a culture as characterised by the formation of personal life world projects by the formation of public and strategic policies.

Growth in student numbers has been a significant, interactive factor in change and this has been accompanied by diversification in student characteristics. Evidence suggests that the dominance of the 'traditional student', as characterised during the initial stages of growth following World War II, is now challenged though not uniformly across the higher education system.

The chapter reviews student characteristics in sections; gender, race, social class and age. It is recognised that these divisions are arbitrary and that there will be interaction between characteristics. For purposes of presentation it was necessary however to adopt some form of classification. Interaction between sections is indicated in the text and discussed in the summary.

Disability was included as a student characteristic in the quantitative element but is not reviewed. Two students in the sample stated that they had a disability but neither was registered disabled. The need for study of this area was recognised, the university includes students with disabilities in its policy on equal opportunities and makes specialist provision, for example, for the hearing impaired. For the purposes of this study the sample precluded involvement in issues surrounding disability.

Social Class.

Social Class has always been, and continues to be a contested concept both theoretical and in empirical application:

> "The problem of the classification of social class has long been a thorny one in sociological research. This is particularly so where there is any attempt to make empirical research reflect theoretical debate." (Drudy 1991 p. 21)

> "Since class is simultaneously one of the most important and widely used and abused concepts in sociology, in addition to being one of the most controversial, it is imperative to be clear from the outset not only what one means by the term, but also how one intends to measure it". Edgell (1993. p.38)

The latter quotation is a clear statement of requirement but is much easier to state than to achieve. A solution might be attempted by becoming embroiled in the theoretical debate on social class. The position taken here was however not to carry out an exhaustive analysis of sociological theories but to produce a working definition which can be operationalised for application to the study cohort and offer a means of relating the findings to existing data on social class and university entrance. Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992) offer an approach which, rather than entailing a commitment to a specified theoretical stance, emphasises a research programme. Such a programme takes as its central concern:

> "the study of relationships among class structures, class mobility, class-based inequalities, and class-based action"
> (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992 p.382).

This type of programme offers a means of examining the relationship between

> ".... historically formed macrosocial structures, on the one hand, and, on the other, the everyday experience of individuals within their particular social milieu, together with patterns of action which follow from this experience." (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992 ibid p. 382)

Recognising the validity of this approach, it is nonetheless necessary to offer a working definition of social class. The definition proposed by Giddens is adopted:

> "We can define a class as a large scale grouping of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the type of life style they are able to lead. Ownership of wealth, together with occupation, are the chief bases of class differences."
> (Giddens 1990 p.481)

This approach states the fundamental economic basis of social class those of relationships to property and the ability to command income, wealth and other resources (Drudy 1991 ibid p. 26) The definition recognises the significance of occupations and relates economic differences to wider social differences. The definition does not make explicit reference to class inequality nor to a hierarchical organisation of class difference. Evidence set out later will demonstrate that inequality exists in access to higher education. Giddens' approach as stated here offers a means of furthering the aims of the study and of placing the findings in context.

Higher education is voluntary and entrance is competitive. Places remain limited, this despite expansion, and access is dependent upon the ability of the individual to demonstrate the required standard of educational attainment. Evidence suggests a rising level of educational qualification among school leavers. The proportion of respondents to the General Household Survey (1991) with no qualifications fell from 59% in 1975 to 37% in 1991(p.200). During the same period the proportion with a degree doubled from 4% to 8%. The percentage gaining higher education qualifications below degree level increased from 6% to 10% . Between 1975 and 1991 the proportion reaching A-level standard rose steadily from 4% to 9% and the percentage attaining GCSE grades A-C (or equivalent qualifications) rose from 13% to 22%.(p.200). Sixty four per cent of 60-69 year- olds were unqualified, compared with 17% of 20-29 year-olds(p.199). There is also an increase in the continuation of education beyond school leaving age. But the findings also show:

> "Throughout the period (1975 - 1991), however, men and women whose fathers belonged to non-manual socio-economic groups have consistently

> formed a higher proportion of those gaining higher qualifications than would be expected from their representation in the sample, while those from a manual background were over-represented among the unqualified."(General Household Survey p. 201)

That is, social class is still a significant factor in gaining higher qualifications. Looking at the data at a more individual level, the son of a professional man is more likely to go to university than one from the same background some 30 years ago (33% in 1991, 29% in 1931) while only 4% of the sons of unskilled labourers will achieve university entrance. (Murray The Times 29. April 1993. Data drawn from 'General Household Survey 1991'). The latter figure shows some improvement over time but hardly indicates the tapping of working class talent on any large scale. In 1990 children of fathers from non-manual socio-economic groups were more likely than those from manual backgrounds to have both undertaken further or higher education and to have gained educational qualifications (General Household Survey 1991 p. 200). Though levels of attainment are improving, some socio-economic groups are gaining greater benefit than others. Entrance to higher education therefore represents a continuation of inequality in attainment throughout the education system. There is little indication of 'class abatement'. (Goldthorpe and Marshall ibid 1992 p. 390)

Egerton and Halsey (1993 p 130) looked for trends in access to tertiary education using a sample of approximately 25,000 drawn from the General Household Surveys for 1985, 1986 and 1987. Three age cohorts were taken who would have passed through tertiary education during the years mid 1950s to mid 1960s, mid 1960s to mid 1970s and mid 1970s to mid 1980s. Entry to universities, polytechnics and colleges were compared for each of the cohorts. Social class was based on the occupation of the fathers' of students. These were recorded on a 19 point social and economic group scale derived from the OPCS classification of occupations and then recoded on to a three point scale derived from the Goldthorpe class schema.

Subsequent analysis of the data drawn from the General Household Surveys of 1985, 1986, and 1987 showed that:

> "The overall picture for social class is of unchanging service class advantage. The children of managerial or professional families are more likely to gain access to university, more likely to have obtained the most prestigious qualification, a degree, at university and more likely to have qualified earlier in life than people from an intermediate or manual class background."
> (Egerton and Halsey 1993 ibid p.189)

No statistically significant trends were found over birth cohorts and the differentiation between classes was found to be 'relatively stable'. Entry to higher education had increased for each class to each institution over successive cohorts

but the service class had maintained its relative advantage in entry to both universities and polytechnics. Some variations between sectors were found. (Egerton and Halsey 1993 ibid p. 187) Students from a service-class background were more likely to have taken a degree course in a university than those from intermediate or working-class backgrounds. The latter were more likely to have taken them in polytechnics or colleges.

The results were found to support the thesis that the more advantaged groups tend to dominate the more prestigious institutions. Proportions of students from intermediate or working-class backgrounds were much higher among mature students than those who were educated in the decade after leaving school (Egerton and Halsey 1993 ibid p. 189). The proportion of mature students was higher in colleges and polytechnics than in universities.

In further support of this Blackburn and Jarman (1993 ibid p. 203) find that:

> "Class inequalities in education have remained fairly constant. There was a decline in the post Robbins era but over the whole period since the Second World War there has, if anything, been an increase."

The ESRC funded Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) took a sample of 6000 people between the ages of 20 and 59 in six urban labour markets in Great Britain in 1986. Over the period 1950 to 1980 there was some variation in differential access between social class groups in accordance with social policy and competition for places. The combination of an increasing number of places and universal grants led to a reduction of inequality following Robbins but there was a rise in inequality in the 1980s cohort as the number of places failed to keep pace with rising demand. The findings of Blackburn and Jarman suggest that social policy might limit the growth of inequality but the combination of both universal grants and increased availability of places need to be applied if differentials are to be reduced. When one or the other is applied the differences widen (Blackburn and Jarman 1993 ibid p. 205).

Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992 ibid p. 389) quote evidence which leads them to suggest that:

> "Thus, even if it could be established that social selection has become more meritocratic, there is little indication of this having had any effect in producing more equal class mobility chances."

The findings presented thus far may be criticised on the grounds of the way in which class has been operationalised (Edgell 1993 ibid p.38). The "traditional analytic class framework", the process via which social class has been operationalised in contemporary British society, has defined social class in terms of occupations, concentrated on people who were economically active on a full-time

basis, assumed the family to be the basic unit of class analysis and assumed class location to be determined by male "head" of household. (Edgell 1993 ibid p.38).

This approach however is open to criticism on a number of counts. For example, by focusing on economically active males the approach excludes 'nearly two thirds of the population'; women, the retired, students, the unemployed and under-employed. In addition these groups are not mutually exclusive. The majority of part-time workers are women, students are often involved in part-time work and unemployed people also work. It is further suggested that to exclude women from class analysis on a priori grounds is sexist and unsociological (Edgell 1993 ibid p.38).

Criticism of the use of occupations is supported by Blackburn and Jarman(1993 ibid p.202) who query whether treating class as a fixed set of occupations is theoretically meaningful. In terms of university access the number of 18 year olds has fluctuated, the number of university entrants has increased, with some variations over time, and there have been changes in the occupational structure. The latter is supported by the General Household Survey(p. 200) which shows that there has been an increase in the professional, managerial and intermediate groups. The basic problem in analysing change is to find that "everything is changing" (Blackburn and Jarman 1993 ibid p.203). Alternatively Drudy argues:

> "The most basic course in research methods will tell us that one simply cannot approach people in the normal survey situation and ask them to give a detailed account of how much they earn or own and hope to get any kind of a truthful answer. Therefore the researcher is constantly thrown back to occupation as the main indicator of social class position." (Drudy 1993 ibid p. 26).

The alternative from a 'purist' qualitative researcher might be to argue that this type of positivist, numerical data is of little value. More realistically it perhaps draws attention to the relative merits and need for dynamic approaches. If we accept that numerical data is of value in this context and that there is a need to relate study findings to existing evidence it seems that occupational titles must play a significant part in gathering data on social class.

The most widely used forms of classification of social class are those applied in the production of official statistics namely, The Classification of Occupations 1980 and the social class categorisation applied in the census. Though doubts have been expressed concerning the comparability between the two schema no major differences have been found in terms of their empirical relationships with health, education and social variables (Drudy 1993 ibid p.23). The underlying assumptions of the 'Classification of Occupations 1980' are largely compatible with a functionalist approach: that social inequality exists, that there is a single continuous scale of social position which can be seen as a number of ordered scales forming a hierarchy, and that occupational titles are the best single empirical indicator of

social position (Drudy 1993 ibid p. 23). The scales currently available in official statistics therefore represent a particular view of the social world. The use of alternative approaches, however, makes comparison with official data difficult. (Drudy 1993 ibid p. 35).

The purposes of this study can only be served by comparison with available official statistics and therefore the Classification of Occupations 1980 was used. It offered the most appropriate means for comparing data with other findings and the most direct method by which a single researcher might code data. The shortcomings of occupational titles however, is recognised.

> "Occupations while still remaining probably the most reliable indicator of social class is, at best, an incomplete one, albeit one used in most empirical enquiries." (Drudy 1993 ibid p. 34)

In this study the occupations of both parents were requested together with the occupation of students where appropriate. Evidence on part-time work was not gathered since this would have led to confusion in the results and added to an already lengthy, and relatively complex questionnaire. Some information on student experience of part-time employment was gathered in relation to obtaining finance during their course, though this was not used in the analysis of class.

Student occupations were also included to take into account the increased number of adults entering higher education. Adults entering higher education might be expected to have occupational titles of their own. In her study of Access students Wakeford (1993 p. 225) found that the class profile of the sample more closely resembled the non-graduate than the graduate population (based on the British Election Survey 1992). The majority of the sample came from non-manual groups (Classes I, II and III in the scheme applied) particularly routine, non-manual (Class III) workers and included over half of all female students. The Access courses surveyed also contained a 'substantial proportion' of people whose occupations had been in manual work, particularly male students. The general BES results support the findings of studies cited earlier; that university graduates are drawn from Classes I, II and to a lesser extent III. The sample in the Wakeford survey was relatively small (391) but indicates the possibility of changing social class in the composition of adult entrants to higher education.

The findings overall, taking account of variations in methodology, indicate little to suggest increasing variation over time in the social class characteristics of student in higher education. There is little or no indication of a major change in this situation in the near future. The results from this study are included in Chapter 6.

Age.

During the 1980s government, industry and educational institutions all made clear their support for increased access of non-conventional students to higher education (Wakeford 1993 p. 217). A number of factors contributed to this development one of which was a change in views of the concept of adulthood and adult learning and adult education. The term adult is an uncertain one, for example:

> "Adulthood is an ideal state. None of us will have reached it in full. The extent in which others are involved in our decision-making will vary from culture to culture."
> (Rogers 1993 p. 22)
> "There is no single point, in modern industrialised society at which a person suddenly and unambiguously becomes an adult."
> (Squires 1987 p.87)

In legal terms, in the UK, an individual becomes an adult at the age of 18 though there remains some debate about the adulthood of a particular individual at this age. Many university students, for example, continue to be largely dependent upon their parents, in financial terms at least, until the end of their first degree course and perhaps beyond. In terms of higher education an adult or mature student is one aged over 21, though some studies of adult students have operated on the age of 25 (e.g. Slotnick et al. 1993). In general adulthood is associated with a stage of development which is characterised by independence, freedom of action and the assumption of those roles which, in a given society, are associated with adult responsibilities.

In the past adult life has been perceived as a long period of stability during which skills, attitudes and values were applied to the process of living, working, leisure and family life. Education during childhood and young adulthood was seen to equip adults for the rest of their lives (Tennant 1988 p. 118) while there was a 'lingering myth' that the capacity of adults to learn declined with the passage of time (Slotnick 1993 et al ibid p.9). In the UK, the term 'Adult Education' carried particular connotations; was associated with courses of a non-vocational, liberal, or recreational nature which did not lead to paper qualifications (Squires 1987 ibid p.88).

More recently adulthood has come to be viewed as a continuing, developmental, learning process and a number of approaches have sought the 'stages' through which adult life passes: "life-span developmental changes, the life cycle or the 'phases' of adult life" (Tennant 1988 p118). Levinson et al (1978 in Woodley et al p.5) carried out an in depth study of 40 men aged between 35 an 45 in a number of occupations. They isolated a number of 'seasons' ('seasons rather than stages because life changes do not necessarily go from 'worse' to 'better'). Findings are summarised in Table 2.1 (over leaf). Movement from one 'season to the next was seen as the product of both external and internal events (external: success or failure

in a job, marriage, divorce) (internal: satisfaction, dissatisfaction with the life structure created)(Woodley 1987 et al p.5)

Table 2.1 The 'seasons of life". Levinson et al.

Season	age	Major tasks
Early adult transition	17 - 22	Move out of the pre-adult world and make preliminary steps into the adult world. Explore possibilities and make preliminary choices.
Entering the adult world	22 - 28	Create a first major life structure, usually marriage and own home. Create a stable life structure but also explore options.
Age 30 transition	28 - 33	Work on imperfections of first life structure. Reconsider choices of early 20s and make necessary changes.
Settling down	33 - 40	Create major new life structure, more stable than first. Usually involves new heavy commitment to occupational success. Importance of 'mentor' who can support and advise in the job.
Mid-life transition	40 - 45	Bridge from early to middle adulthood. Must re-examine settling down structure and modify it. "What have I done with my life?"
Entering middle adulthood	45 - 50	Create new life structure. Focus is on new occupational tasks, including acting as mentor for younger colleagues.

(From Levinson in Woodley et al 1987 p.5)

Alternatively Gould (Table 2.2) (Woodley et al 1978 p.6) formulated a series of hierarchical stages going from 'worse' to 'better', as the old childish structure is dismantled and replaced with a stronger one. During the conscious process of growing up the individual enhances self understanding through the processes of crisis and change which are characteristic of human understanding.

Table 2.2 Gould.

Stage	Age	Major changes
Leaving our parents world	16 - 22	Leaving the protective 'blanket' of our family and giving up idea that parents will rescue us if necessary.
'I'm nobody's baby now	22 - 28	Developing independence, competent, identity; coming to terms with idea that things will not necessarily work out perfectly just because we follow our parents rules.
Opening up what's inside	28 - 34	Turning inward to discover additional facets of ourselves besides competence and independence, e.g. tenderness, compassion, fears etc...
Mid life decade	35 - 45	Accepting our own mortality, realising we have to get on with anything still left to do. Achieving sense of freedom and responsibility for oneself.

From Woodley et al 1987 p.6

Stage theories reveal that adult life is not a long period of stability but is subject to growth and change in much the same way as childhood and adolescence. If adulthood is a process of change and development then almost by definition, adults learn throughout life: the concept of 'front-end' education which equips people for the rest of their lives is replaced by continuing education in response to, and in support of, growth and change. Educational provision for adults however need not imply 'more of the same' approaches used in the education of children. If adults are different from children and younger people then it is reasonable to argue that they

may learn in a different way and via a different approach; androgeny as opposed to pedagogy. Further, there may be a need to develop structures and delivery methods more appropriate for adult needs. A theory of adulthood can be linked to a theory of adult education.

This viewpoint is characterised in the approach adopted by Slotnick et al (1993 p.5)

> "Our view of the adult learner was influenced by our adopting a humanistic perspective toward teaching and learning: We believe there is a natural tendency for people to learn and that learning will flourish if a nourishing encouraging environment is provided. We also believe that, although there is great diversity in the nature and lives of adults, there are predictable patterns (developmental stages, for example) experienced by most adults."

Slotnick et al (ibid 1993 pp 6-7)also subscribe to the claim that adults learn in a different way from children and young people, an argument manifested in the pedagogy/androgeny debate. The debate centres around the suggestion that children are largely passive and dependent upon others as learners, that the stress is largely upon learning outcomes and that motivation results from external pressures from parents, teachers and the need to obtain 'grades'. Adult students bring 'life experiences' to learning, are internally motivated by a perceived 'need' to know, choose when to learn, are more active in making decisions about their own learning and are more process orientated. Young learners are in a transition stage between the two.

Stage theory combined with androgeny validate adult education, provide it with a unique identity, premised on the atypical identity of the student, and offer a structure and content. But the reality is less 'tidy' than the theory might suggest. Stage theories often fail to take account of structural social change such as unemployment and changes in gender role (Woodley et al 1987 ibid p. 9). Fiske's (1980) longitudinal study of several hundred adults (Woodley et al 1987 ibid p.9) found many rapid fluctuations depending upon the individual's relationships, work demands and other life stresses. In addition many studies have concentrated on men and the life 'cycles' produced clearly do not apply to women. Recognition of adult development and continued learning need not necessarily imply that the adult life cycle progresses in a series of immutable stages, or that adult life roles are inevitable. Stage theory offers little recognition that adult roles may be oppressive or that alternatives are available (Tennant 1988 p.121). Apart from a recognition of the ability of adults to bring a wider range of experiences to learning the claims for androgeny seem doubtful. The dominance of passivity, extrinsic motivation and emphasis on outcome at any stage of learning seems an over-simplification of a complex process. The aim to produce a learning approach which is unique to adults leads to a definition of learning at any stage.

The alternative of 're-current' education or 'life long education'(Tennant 1988 ibid p.125), and related concepts, accepts the diversity of life cycle patterns, challenges

the concept of a 'typical' life cycle, takes account of social and technological change (such as demographic change, changes in the length of the working day, retirement age etc...), and argues that educational institutions should respond to this diversity in offering diversity of provision which takes into account and widens individual options. Adult development remains central but the argument shifts from seeking a place for 'adult education' in its old form, towards the life-long provision of education, formal, informal and less formal.

Woodley et al (1987) carried out a large scale national study of provision for mature students funded by the DES in an attempt to discover which students studied what and in which institutions. The study included courses which led to qualifications for entry to higher education as well as those which did not. Between 5000 and 6000 students completed questionnaires and the findings were supported by interviews with students and teachers. Of mature students in higher education one third had qualifications above A-level on entry and only 8% had been admitted to university with less than the standard qualifications (Woodley et al ibid p.53) The students were already educationally advantaged. Conclusions on the educational qualifications of mature students in higher education are stated as:

> ".... mature students do not represent a cross-section of the population in that they are more likely to have attended selective and non-state-maintained schools, they stayed on longer at school and they emerged with better qualifications than the population as a whole. However, there are still substantial numbers who left school at an early age with no or few qualifications." (Woodley at al. 1987 p.57)

Changes in the view of adults and adult education were accompanied by demographic change. The anticipated decline in the 'traditional' student population was expected to reach serious proportions by the 1990s. This expectation persisted despite recognition that the change was not expected to affect the social groups who formed the base of traditional HE admissions. Perhaps more influential was an amalgam of interests including government urged on by industry in demands for a better qualified work force(Wakeford 1993 ibid p.218).

There were also social factors; wastage of talent and a recognition that access was denied to some social groups leading to an explicit assumption during the recent expansion of higher education that the intake to institutions should be widened and that more means different (Wakeford 1993 ibid p.218). Between 1982 and 1992 the number of mature home, first year, students in universities, polytechnics and colleges more than doubled from 139,000 to 319,000. More students over the age of 21 entered higher education than young students for the first time. (THES 25/11/94. Report on DE statistical supplement 10/94). The extent to which unemployment and the economic recession contributed to this increase is uncertain. The pattern of adult access, however, varies between sectors and institutions (Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 218).

Table 2.3 shows that polytechnics and colleges catered for a greater proportion of mature students attending both full and part-time. Mature students constitute a minority of full-time students and a majority of part-time, though the latter is a minority activity for first degree courses.

Table 2.3 Number and proportion of mature students on first-degree courses 1990. Source: DFE Bulletin 18/92

Mode of attendance and institution	Number of mature students (thousands)	proportion (%)	Mature as a proportion of all students (%)
full-time			
universities	10.6	22	12
polytechnics and colleges	24.1	49	26
part-time			
universities	2.0	4	95
polytechnics and colleges	12.6	25	25
total			

From Wakeford 1993 p. 219

Table 2.4 Percentage change in young and mature first degree mature students by mode of attendance and institution 1980 - 1990. Source DFE Bulletin 18/92

Mode of attendance and institution	% change young students	% change mature students
full-time		
universities	+ 8	+ 40
polytechnics and colleges	+ 93	+ 152
part-time		
universities	- 57	+ 136
polytechnics and colleges	+ 218	+ 100

From Wakeford (1993 p. 220)

The percentage change during the 1980s is presented in Table 2.4 which shows an overall expansion in the higher education system and that mature students have increased their participation to a greater extent than the traditional group particularly in polytechnics and universities.

Table 2.5 Comparison of entry qualifications of young and mature students accepted degree course applicants. Source: Statistical supplements to UCCA and PCAS Annual Reports 1990-1991

	Young UCCA (%)	Young PCAS (%)	Mature UCCA (%)	Mature PCAS (%)
Qualifications				
A-levels/higher	96	78	39	28
BTEC	2	11	18	16
UK degree		na	5	na
Other UK quals	1	11	31	54
Overseas quals	1		7	2
	100	100	100	100
Total number	91,718	52,428	14,999	20,367

From Wakeford (1993 p.221)

Qualifications on entry to higher education also show a variation between 'mature' and 'traditional' groups. Table 2.5 shows that ''traditional" 18 year old students are most likely to enter using traditional A-level qualifications, the vast majority of them doing so. Mature students are more likely to enter with 'other' qualifications but there is some uncertainty concerning what these may be since neither clearing house publishes a breakdown (Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 221). Presumably some of these will be vocational qualifications which comprised the alternative route of entry to A-levels prior to the introduction of Access courses as a 'third route'.

Access courses came into being following an invitation from the DES to seven LEAs to introduce courses for people who had 'valuable experience but lack the qualifications required for entry to higher education'. The initiative provided an opportunity for students to obtain equivalent entry qualifications while by-passing the traditional entry route. The courses were to be evaluated in order to enable the DES to decide whether to extend the provision of such courses (Fulton 1989 ibid p. 51). In the years since the initiative the numbers of Access courses have risen from single figures to over 600 though they achieved particular prominence in 1987 when they became part of the strategy of HE expansion as the third route (Wakeford 1993 ibid p.221). The courses have expanded geographically, they were initiated mainly in the Greater London area, in subjects offered and numerically:

> "Access courses have become a way in which thousands of mature students each year may enter HE" (Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 221)

However it is difficult to say how many. As already stated a detailed breakdown on entry qualifications is not available. Examination of the number of students entering polytechnics and colleges using Access courses (Table 2.6) suggests that such courses are making provision for mature students and are most popular among women (70% of all of those recorded in the table) and particularly older women.

Table 2.6 Number and proportion of first year students using Access courses qualification for entry to polytechnics and colleges by age England, 1990. Sources: DFE Bulletin 18/92

	male	female	male %	female %
mode and age				
full-time				
under 21	56	61	-	-
21-24	239	310	4	7
25+	611	1780	13	26
part-time				
under 21	8	1	1	
21-24	12	9	1	1
25+	48	160	1	9
total	974	2321		

Wakeford 1993 p.222.

However the figures must be treated with caution. They are calculated on the basis of 3000 students but evidence from other sources suggests that between 12,000 and 15,000 students are registered on Access courses in England and Wales. The evidence suggests either a huge dropout form Access courses or a discrepancy

arising out of bureaucratic error (Wakeford 1993 ibid p.223). It might also suggest that Access students are not using the qualification for university entrance immediately after completion of their course.

In 1991 Wakeford set out to examine the social composition of students attending Access courses: what kind of people became Access course students. She argues that such information was lacking, findings on Access students were fragmentary and largely anecdotal, and more information was needed to assess whether the aim of the initiative was being met; to offer entry to higher education for groups largely denied at an earlier stage of education. A self-completion questionnaire was administered in 27 institutions to 391 students. The findings indicate some variation from the initial aims of Access courses particularly when compared with the findings of an earlier study (Millins 1984), the only other work which was concerned with the social characteristics of students.

Wakeford finds (1993 ibid. 224) a comparatively smaller proportion of women in her sample resulting to some extent from the subject content of courses. A greater proportion of men had been drawn in by the opportunity to study science and technology. This, together with the finding that women were older than men on entry seems to suggest a continuance of gender differentiation. The proportion of students from ethnic minorities had also fallen between the two studies though it remained higher than the proportion in the population(Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 225).The social class profile of the Wakeford sample was found to resemble the social class profile of all non-graduates in the population (Wakeford 1993 ibid p225). The courses were attracting a particularly high proportion of students whose own occupation placed them in social class III (routine non-manual or clerical) but also attracted a substantial proportion who had been in manual work, particularly among men. This suggests that Access courses were less likely to under-represent students from manual class positions than higher education admissions as a whole (Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 226). With reference to qualifications the majority of the students in the sample had some qualifications on leaving school and the majority had also gained some qualifications between leaving school and commencing the Access course (Wakeford 1993 ibid pp 225 - 226). The findings suggest that Access courses offer opportunities to students who were previously unqualified but many already have qualifications and may have had a propensity to continue with educational activities after leaving full-time education.

Wakeford (Wakeford 1993 ibid p. 228) draws attention to the increasing importance of Access courses and suggests that there is a need to monitor student social profiles and to target different groups in order to ensure that the courses do not begin to mirror existing inequalities in entry to higher education. She draws attention to a gap in knowledge of the routes via which adults enter higher education:

> "Although there has been an increase in the number of mature students there has not been a corresponding effort to monitor the routes through

> which adults become mature students on first-degree courses." (Wakeford 1993 ibid p.228)

The qualifications obtained by many adults are subsumed under the heading of 'other' and qualifications are the only means available from the data of gaining any indication of the route they followed. Other queries emerge from this on the routes followed by adults. For example, Wakeford's sample included Access students who had qualifications. This raises speculation on how they acquired these. If they had A-levels whether they acquired them while at school or since they have left school at evening or part-time day classes. Similarly, queries on the routes via which they obtained vocational qualifications. Finally, the question is raised as to the routes followed into higher education by adult students who did not take an Access course. The significant increase in the number of adults entering higher education raises the queries on the routes via which they are entering.

Gender.

There is now an extensive and wide ranging literature on the changing role of women in society and the interaction between education and this change. The recognition of women's studies as an academic discipline in a number of universities is itself both a recognition of change and has led to the production of supportive literature. The aim here has not been to attempt an exhaustive review of all of this evidence but to present sufficient, hopefully pertinent, evidence to place the findings of this study in context.

Between the years 1944 and 1988 the number of women entering university has shown a consistently upward trend (Blackburn and Jarman 1933 ibid p.207). Women however, were disadvantaged not only in obtaining fewer places in higher education than men but also they were more likely to take degrees in colleges and more likely to qualify later as mature students. There is evidence that this trend is changing as more women attend university and there is increased enrolment of women in polytechnics (Egerton and Halsey 1993 p. 183). In recent years, since about 1970, there has been considerable growth in university entrance matched also in higher education outside the universities(Blackburn and Jarman 1933 ibid p.209). McNay(1994 p. 171) finds more recent evidence of a "spectacular" increase in the participation of women in higher education. Between 1981-82 and 1991-92 the participation of women in both universities and polytechnics grew at a considerably faster rate than for men (69 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). This growth rate is even more notable in consideration of the fact that women are in the minority of the population under the age of 45.

Increased participation in higher education has been accompanied by increases in participation and attainment in education in general. The increase in the percentage gaining qualifications between 1975 and 1991 has been proportionately greater among women than among men and education statistics show that girls and women

are increasingly as well qualified as boys and men. (General Household Survey 1991 p.200)

Gender variations in subjects and academic disciplines remain, however. The increased participation of women in polytechnics found by Halsey may in part result from the incorporation of 'traditional women's' courses in teaching and nursing, for women continue to be over-represented in teaching courses (Modood 1993 ibid p. 174). Gender variations are also indicated in the findings for Access courses in which participation among men increased with the introduction of science, technology, and computer options (Wakeford 1993 ibid p.224). There is however evidence of change. For example, in universities in 1965-66 women constituted 35% of all arts students, this increased to 50% in 1974-75 but has since stabilised. In Engineering the number of women increased from 2% in 1965-66 to 11% in 1987-88 and a greater increase occurred in pure sciences (Blackburn and Jarman 1993 ibid p.209).

This general increase in participation, particularly recently, has interacted with wider social changes in perceptions of women and their role in society as a result of increased opportunities in the labour market. There has been a growth in traditionally female dominated sectors of the labour market (clerical and service), an increase in high level jobs and a decline in the number of young people entering the labour market. Demographic changes have resulted in women marrying earlier, living longer and having fewer children in a shorter and earlier period of life. There has been a re-structuring of psychological expectations so that women look for work-related as opposed to marriage-related self-identities. These combine, at a more practical level, with a recognition of the need for the incomes from working women to keep many families above the poverty line in offering greater opportunities for women in employment (White, Cox and Cooper 1992 p. 5). It is estimated that women will account for over 85% of employment growth in the 1990s and will constitute 45% of the labour force by 2001 (General Household survey 1991 p.130).

Increased involvement of women in the labour market and increased participation in higher education, commencing after World War II, has had a cumulative effect so that working women and women undergraduates have become accepted as 'normal'. The former view of a 'woman's place' and the notion that there was no point in educating a woman for a few years of work have lost any credibility as "life-time careers for women have become progressively more available and more evident." (Blackburn and Jarman 1993 p.210). The trend is towards increased equity sufficient for Halsey to summarise:

> "Gender inequalities have decreased rapidly over the last two decades and feminist advocacy has moved somewhat towards equality of access to the higher echelons of the professions and business management." (Halsey 1993 ibid p.131)

White, Cox and Cooper(1992 ibid p.3 and 4)suggest that:

> "It seems reasonable to expect that women will find it easier to reach top jobs in future."

But, inequality remains, sufficient to suggest that improvement in trends should not encourage complacency. The 'traditional role' of women as, for example, taking primary responsibility for child care has not 'gone away' but accompanies them into their 'new' situation. Women are expected to take on additional responsibilities as students or workers while making appropriate arrangements for continuing demands. The entry of a higher proportion of women into the labour market may depend on increasing the availability of flexible working arrangements and of subsidised childcare (General Household Survey 1991 p. 130).

Meanwhile, discrimination against women remains, for example, White, Cox and Cooper(1992 ibid p.3 and 4)find that:

> "Over all, women do not enjoy the same job conditions, pay, status and career opportunities as their male counterparts."

And:

"In any given occupation, the higher the rank the lower the proportion of women."

The evidence suggests that the prior experiences of women entering higher education who have family responsibilities will differ from men and from, probably younger, women who have not experienced or who do not have these commitments. It also seems more likely that women with family commitments will enter via a different route.

Ethnic Origin.

The extent of involvement of ethnic minorities in higher education has received increased clarification since 1990. In response to uncertainty resulting from a lack of hard evidence (Modood 1993 p.168) PCAS and UCCA decided to ask candidates to specify their ethnic origin. Analysis of this data carried out by Modood (1993), Taylor (1992a), and Connelly (1994) provide evidence of a national pattern of ethnic minority entry to higher education. Their findings are summarised in Appendix 1.

In terms of this study the sample as a whole proved to be predominantly white, almost 94%, (Table 2.7 over leaf) and there was little variation between courses.

As a result of this finding, together with the low representation of ethnic minorities in the focus group samples, the study offered little opportunity to become involved in the debate on the issue of entry to higher education and ethnic minorities. With reference to teacher education this is recognised as a source of concern. Particularly

so given the under-representation of ethnic minority groups in teacher education nationally and that members of ethic minority groups are less likely to apply for teacher education courses.(Modood 1993 ibid p. 174)

Table 2.7 Ethnic origin: all sample.

*Categories	Responses.	
White	232	
Pakistani		1
Bangladeshi		1
Chinese		0
Black		2
Asian		2
Indian		3
Other		1
Black Caribbean		3
Black-other		1
Black African		3
Asian-other		0
Subtotal	17	17
No record	2	2
total	251	
Categories	Response	%
White	232	92.43
other	17	6.78
no record	2	0.79
total	251	100

**Categories: taken from the university application form.*

Student prior experience.

Relevant to this study this section sets out to draw attention to the significance of the increased diversity of students entering higher education and to draw attention to typical attitudes to, and about, higher education which may influence prospective students.

School and school leaving.

Decisions at school leaving may be of far-reaching significance:

> "The transition from school represents a crucial point of intersection between major life domains, namely the educational system and the labour market. It is at this point that most young people are at considerable risk in their attempts (and frequently that of their parents) to ensure continuity in their life course..... It is at this point that individual attempts to control outcomes are crucial if the person is to secure an appropriate foothold in the labour market."
> (Layder, Ashton, Sung(1991 p. 453)

Decisions at the statutory age of school leaving also constitute the key point for future educational routes. Staying on at school or leaving for employment is one of a number of alternatives which might include, for example, entry to FE, work involving training to a variety of levels, or Government sponsored training schemes. The evidence presented on increasing levels of adult entry to higher education suggests that structural/cultural variables affect decision-making at this stage causing those who might have had the potential to enter higher education not to do so. Consideration of decision-making at this stage might throw some light on factors contributing to this situation.

Contrasting evidence of experience at school leaving is provided by two relevant studies. Roberts and Higgens(1992) carried out a research project in 100 higher education institutions(universities, polytechnics and colleges), using a postal questionnaire, focus group interviews and 'informal chats' in social areas in institutions. In all some 5,650 students, all in their second year of study were included in the sample. The study was directed at the 'traditional student, 'aged under 20 on entry to higher education', but over 400 'mature' students also took part.

The findings show that in response to a question on their reasons for going into higher education students entering via the 'traditional route' produced 6 'top' points of view supported by comments from the students obtained during the qualitative element of the study (Roberts and Higgens 1992 p.25). Responses were as follows:

1. Going in to higher education was the natural thing to do (peer and parental pressure)

> "I was brought up with the idea of going to university
> "There is no-one in our family who doesn't have a degree."
> "Neither of my parents have been through higher education and they said you are going - FULL STOP."

The researchers comment:

> "For many students (particularly those in universities) one of the biggest decisions of their life was in reality a non-decision." (Roberts and Higgens ibid p.28)

2. Higher education improves job prospects in the long term.
This was more often cited by polytechnic students than those in college or university:

> "People want graduates and you start one or two steps up the ladder."
> "I was a chef. I wanted job satisfaction - I wasn't going to be another Roux brother."

"I saw that a degree was necessary I the careers world today - especially in getting jobs away from the area I was brought up in."
"You get control of your life."

3. Entering higher education postpones the need to work

"If you go into a job at 18 you will need to work for 40 years. I want to put off working as long as possible."
"You can surround yourself with like-minded people and no factory whistle to make them disappear."

4. Higher education postpones the need to make a decision - time to think.

"Initially I came because I didn't know what I wanted to do career-wise and I thought I might as well keep learning until I decide."

5. Allows students to pursue knowledge/interest in chosen subject.

"I love studying and writing essays."
"A test of what I could achieve."

6. Allows students to become independent.

"A stepping stone to reality."
"You get overall development, you get an academic development and you develop socially. Your whole self changes."
"It is a gentle introduction to being an adult and growing up!"
"I lived a sheltered life in Cornwall - this was my chance to go."
"Having been closeted in a girl's school for years, it is quite educational to be let out amongst men."

For many students in the sample the process of staying on at school and going in to higher education was a continuous, almost seamless, progression which began prior to statuary school leaving age with the choice of subjects, and which allowed a delay before further decision-making. It offered academic and social opportunities: academic study and a period of 'growing up' before entering the world of work. In the long term it improved employment prospects.

Another view is provided by the work of Heathfield and Wakeford (1990) who set out to explore some of the factors which underlie the decision of sixteen-year -olds to stay on in full-time education. The methodology used group work exercises more frequently associated with drama teaching with pupils in their 4th year. In addition pupils were asked to write down certain views and opinions, to draw posters and create advertisements whose imagined audience would consist of friends outside the group, and to complete a short questionnaire. Attitudes to higher education were included as a significant part of the study. Seven or eight students from each of 4 schools attended a 3 day residential course at the University of Lancaster.

The school pupils found very little to be gained from study for 'its own sake' and no evidence of a 'natural progression' into staying on and entering higher education. There seemed to be a generally recognised, though not stated, 'level of production' which delineated the point at which a pupil became a 'swot'. The respondents saw school work as 'work' which had to be done, sufficient to meet the required level of production but no more. Work led to qualifications but there was little evidence of enjoyment of learning 'for its own sake'.

This view of academic study continued into the respondents views of university (Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.19). Though some of the respondents had formed impressions from talking to older friends and siblings 'media images predominated".(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.42) They expressed a dichotomous, almost a characatured, negative, view of university students. On the one hand the dissolute student engaged in smoking, drinking and parties and on the other, the academic side of university life which depicted unhappy, bespectacled, students with piles of books. This dichotomous view was found to pervade all of the imagery of the respondents' concepts of studentship. University students were seen as:

> "....dissolute, superior or just part of a different culture - with books under their arms, eating green apples". (Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.20)

For most of the students there had been no direct contact with university staff or students to generate alternative concepts. During discussion, none of the students stated that their parents had been to university. One of the students gave her mother's view of the residential experience:

> "Me mum didn't want me to come. Well, she said it was good, like, but she didn't want me to come 'cos she said all the people were weird ... when they are on telly you see them walking around, like ... in stupid clothes and everything."

The respondents recognised that they had to make a choice following their GCSE examinations and felt pressurised, sometimes to the point of panic, by the significance of this. "I don't like it 'cos its for the rest of my life I've got to decide." (Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.40) But they saw staying on as a none-decision or inertia. They were aware of local employment conditions and that staying on provided increased opportunity of avoiding boring work. There was an emphasis on the money provided by work, however, and that:

> "...leaving was freedom, regardless of what the students left to do, and staying on in education was to be tied down to the disciplines of school work, especially homework." ."(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.40)

Government training schemes were held in low esteem and those who went on to them "didn't think".

The pressure involved in decision-making came from the work load associated with examinations, from teachers, and from the plans of their friends rather than from home. Parental differences on the merits of staying on were expressed:

> "Me Dad, he's always moaning at me. Saying I should be going out and earning some money instead of staying in and revising and going off to college."(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p. 24)

The residential experience(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p.42) made available to a small group of the students produced some marginal alterations in views of university. Most had no experience of higher education institutions and were surprised by the size and complexity of the campus. Much of their concern was with the differences between 'them', the university students and 'us' the respondents:

> "We saw loads of people today ... and was getting dirty looks from everyone."(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p. 43)
> "Cos we don't dress like them ... they look freaky and we look normal ..."(1990 Heathfield and Wakeford ibid p. 43)
> "Students walking around in specs - and scarves. Round specs and scarves."(Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 ibid p. 45)

Some views were modified. The students appeared less 'stuck up' than the respondents had anticipated. But views of university students as 'different' proved difficult to change.

The two studies are not directly comparable: differences in methodology, sample size and stage in the education process preclude this. But the findings can be summarised (Table 2.8 over leaf) in a manner which offers a valid summary and demonstrates how the results of each enhance the other and provide insights into experiences prior to entry to university.

The findings suggest the existence of two 'cultures', one which supports entry to higher education and one which is less likely to do so. Both groups had experienced peer pressure but aimed in different directions. For many of the students the process of preparation for school leaving had been long term and proactive. In turn the school pupils were reacting short term to the situation with which they were faced. The students attended schools in which staying on was more likely to be the norm while the pupils had attended schools where this was not the case. The 'family culture' of both groups in the form of the knowledge and experience of their parents had prepared the groups to travel in different directions in the future. The students were anticipating moving into a world that contained familiarities while to the school pupils it was a foreign world. The fear of isolating themselves and becoming 'swots' suggests perhaps a fear of isolating themselves from a whole culture. The long term view of the students is in opposition to the short term view of the pupils who seek the more immediate rewards of employment, even if it might be of a low level.

Table 2.8 Findings from two studies compared.

students (Roberts and Higgens)	school pupils (Heathfield and Wakeford)
had shown themselves capable of entrance to higher education	were considered by their teachers as capable of benefiting from staying on at school - possibly university.
peer and parental pressure to stay on at school and apply for higher education	peer pressure not to become 'swots' little evidence of parental support, some negative responses from parents
parents had experience of higher education	parents had no experience of higher education
higher education offered opportunity to study	tired of academic word which was perceived as 'work' to be done. Sought freedom from study and school
staying on the natural thing to do	staying on a 'non-decision'
staying on provided time to think and make decisions	the decision to stay on or leave perceived as significant and difficult, to the point of 'panic' for some
Entered higher education	Did not see themselves as the kind of people who went into higher education.

The school study indicates the loss of talent which might be regained at a later stage through adult entry to higher education. This, provided that attitudes which perceive academic learning as appropriate to some segments of the population and not to others can be overcome.

Women Returners.

The retrospective views of school experience provided by the respondents in a study carried out by Pascall and Cox (1993) adds to evidence of the interaction between structural and 'cultural' variables at school leaving age. Pascall and Cox (1993) studied, via in-depth interviews, 43 women, who had returned to higher education. Most of the sample had attended selective schools and all but 8 had left school with qualifications; some had A-levels.

The parents of the respondents had a generally supportive and positive attitude towards their daughters' education but within this some variation was found (Pascall and Cox 1993 p.31). There was evidence of gender discrimination;

> "Girls are going to get married and education is wasted. Education is for boys because they are the breadwinners."

Staying on at school beyond compulsory school leaving age(Pascall and Cox 1993 p.33), was a new experience for many of the families. The respondents in the study belonged to generations which attended secondary school between the end of World War II and the introduction of secondary education. They were, as "children of the 1944 Act", often the first generation of their families to see opportunities beyond school.

> "Ignorance about the workings of secondary education was widespread, and knowledge of opportunities beyond school very limited indeed." (Pascall and Cox 1993 p.33)

Some parents had not themselves received, nor wished their children to receive, any more education than was absolutely necessary while others adopted a *laissez faire* attitude.

> "Parents, with little to assist them in their own histories, were unable to present their offspring with clear pictures of what the next educational steps might bring. Some simply opposed, by reference to their own experience: more supported, but perhaps without the skill that experience might have provided, and a very few could offer their own careers in higher education as models."(Pascall and Cox 1993 p.33)

Parents were often proud of the educational achievements of their offspring and negative responses to education were not necessarily linked to lack of parental experience. (Pascall and Cox 1993 p.32) Significant in some instances also was a parental sense of deprivation in their own educational experiences which motivated them to encourage their offspring.

In structural terms class is a major structural variable in operation in this situation, more so than gender (Pascall and Cox 1993 p. 33).

> "Whilst sponsorship from school and home was often in evidence, it was not sufficient to pull them into the stream of those whose natural destiny was higher education." (Pascall and Cox 1993 p.39)

Pascall and Cox argue (Pascall and Cox 1993 p. 37) that whilst the grammar school was a "major sponsor of social mobility during the first two thirds of the twentieth century", it had its limits, especially for girls. Without the support of precedents amongst either parents or siblings, the chances of evading the effects of class when leaving school, of seeing possibilities of which were outside the experiences of the family the chances of "narrowing the social distance to be crossed were indeed very slim". These findings echo those of the earlier studies cited. Many of the respondents were clearly academically able but did not leave school to enter university, though a small number went into teacher training.

Prior experiences which differ radically from those of the 'traditional student' are offered by a group of working class women who were left feeling "inferior and unimportant" by their school experiences.(Learning the Hard Way" 1989 p. 65) For this group higher education offered an escape:

> "It is not so much the milk and honey we hope to find as the hardship and oppression we leave behind." ("Learning the Hard Way" 1989 ibid p.67)

In returning to education this group sought both escape and future passports to success. They recognised qualifications as representing access to well-paid satisfying employment. But education also offered escape from dependence and vulnerability towards an opportunity to have some control over their lives; escape from a world in which women were seen only in the context of their relationship to others. For some, who had worked in refuges or community groups, education offered a means of obtaining wider perspectives to add to the experiences they had already gained, and an opportunity to further develop skills and qualifications. They recognised that their view was instrumental but were of the opinion that learning 'for its own sake' was a luxury they could not afford.

They viewed their situation in preparation for entry to higher education in stark contrast to that experienced by school leavers referred to in earlier studies (Roberts and Higgens ibid p.28)

> "The analogy of the conveyor belt is often used to describe how young people are processed in the preparation for higher education. They are transported and deposited at the starting line, ready for the big event."
>
> "Rather, we've had to scramble over hurdles and around obstacles to arrive on the scene already somewhat punch-drunk." ("Learning the Hard Way" 1989 ibid p.83)

The authors recognise that returning to education is never easy for mature students, men or women ("Learning the Hard Way" 1989 ibid p.67) and outline their particular 'hurdles' and 'obstacles'. Women continued to carry the primary responsibility for domestic and childcare which is seen as both 'emotional and caring labour'. They experienced the ambivalent attitudes of others to study, which was not seen as 'real work' and in some cases direct and systematic opposition and abuse, particularly from their partners. Financial factors also played a significant part. As working class women they felt that they lacked the right to financial independence. Whilst, for most students, impoverishment would be a temporary stage, for this group it was a continuation of 'our struggle to survive'. ("Learning the Hard Way" 1989 ibid p. 83) Financial dependence on a male partner also produced difficulties; partners were required to sign grant forms and might move jobs or house at inconvenient stages during a course of study. The authors also experienced a sense of guilt in being 'pulled in different directions', in the negative responses of others, and in leaving work to become students. Education as a way out was not supported by their school experiences which left them feeling 'inferior and unimportant' ("Learning the Hard Way" 1989 ibid p.65)

Data on characteristics already considered shows that these women were not 'typical' of adults returning to higher education: the evidence suggests that working class women represent a very small percentage. Given the difficulties they experience this seems hardly surprising. Their experiences echo the findings discussed earlier among the children in the Heathfield and Wakeford study of a

'culture' which does not recognise the significance of education for its members. In this situation, however, two, interacting, structural variables are clearly in operation; gender, social attitudes to women, and social class.

The 'traditional female role' a career for women as housewife and mother, was noted in the study carried out by the Pascal and Cox:

> "Our respondents grew up(though with some allowances for differences in age) with the expectations that wife, mother and housewife were the proper female roles and source of womens' identity. Very high rates of marriage prevailed during adolescence: cohabitation was not yet widely acceptable; women continued to bear the major responsibility for housework; most women had at least one child; most women left the labour market when the child was born. Most respondents did, in fact, conform to these expectations and experienced all three roles." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p. 58)

Nearly all of the Pascal and Cox sample had tried marriage, had found motherhood rewarding but:

> "Respondents were unanimous in feeling the inadequacy of domesticity as a life's work and source of identity."(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.59)

Employment experiences affected this sample. Almost half of the sample contained women who had been in work which was boring frustrating, discriminatory and without prospects, training or career, but who hoped that higher education would provide access to improved employment opportunities (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p. 43). The sample, however, also contained women who had obtained qualifications at school and had been in professional occupations. They enjoyed their work, and though they were aware of gender hierarchies, denied that being a woman had been a disadvantage to themselves.(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.49) Their employment had been prior to child bearing however, and at the point prior to entry to higher education they found that their position as wives, mothers and housewives made their position in the job market uncertain. Careers could not be combined with motherhood. Some had been employed in part-time work at a level not commensurate with their qualifications after the birth of their children. Consequently respondents offered four employment-related reasons for entering higher education (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.66): the need for a new job, escape from unrewarding work, the need for a job which would combine with parenthood and some conventional need for career advancement.

Reasons for entering higher education were more complex than escape however. Though respondents were able to point to decisive factors, for example, marriage breakdown, age of children in starting school or playgroup, economic factors as well as factors associated with work, these formed "an intricate web of elements". (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.61) There were a number of factors which came

together, a range of alternatives that could be resolved, to produce the situation which led to a return to education.

The educational experiences of these groups provide more information on routes of entry to higher education. For some the qualifications obtained at school meant that higher education was the logical next step. Qualifications obtained previously:

> "held the possibility of higher education in the background to be brought out when appropriate".(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p. 71)

For others a longer route taking advantage of alternative provisions in the education system was pursued:

> "from the age of the children being about three or four I'd done something in the evening - evening classes .... an O-level course in economics": "I'd done the OU before coming here. I'd always done something." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.71)

> "I didn't in my wildest dreams think that I could ever get a degree even at that stage, but I went back to evening classes to get some A-levels - just to get some qualifications together and find out what I was made of .... It was always a dream to go on to FE, even just an A-level seemed a fantastic thing to do."(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.71)

A number of respondents spoke of the 'struggle' experienced during their "long haul" through O and A-levels. This often took the form of drift and "muddling through", rather than a planned process. Given the range of alternative demands to be balanced this is hardly surprising. Some members of this group expressed the same ignorance of HE as the school children cited in the earlier study. HE was like "another planet, unthought of, uncharted".

The women in "Learning the Hard Way" recognised that their aims in entering higher education were largely instrumental: improved career prospects and increased independence. To these, the respondents to the Pascal and Cox study add a concern for missed opportunities, a recognition of learning for its own sake. The 'majority' of the respondents saw the education process as significantly more than work related while several were defensive about the 'instrumental thing' and the 'diploma disease'.

> "Money is part of it, but it's something that's going to be there for the next 30 years or so. It's a job that I wanted to do, a fulfilment, a great sense of satisfaction."(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.82)

The respondents saw value in the cultural aspect of education and were aware of the 'outward' and 'inward' ways of experiencing education.

> "It was merely to extend myself. I always knew that I'd got the ability to get a degree ... It was purely for myself." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.83)
>
> "It's fulfilled a basic need within myself. There were lots of questions that I had never answered within myself. I started to ask myself questions and it prolonged the definite need to get back to resolve them." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.83)

The differences in emphasis between respondents in the Pascal and Cox study and the contributors to 'Learning the Hard Way" might again be related to social background. The women in the Pascal and Cox study, many of whom had been through selective schooling and had been in professional careers, were able to allow themselves to speculate and introspect, an indulgence not available to the contributors to "Learning the Hard Way", nor perhaps a part of their academic, cognitive, experience.

The need for change was significant for both groups, though not necessarily for the same reasons. For the contributors to "Learning the Hard Way", and for some of the respondents to the Pascal and Cox study, harsh economic reality was a driving force, but other reasons were also offered:

> "I felt I was vegetating. I felt this would open my mind a lot." Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.84)
>
> "I felt I needed it at that time because I felt stale."(Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p.84)

Sources of advice and Influences.

Decisions such as entering higher education are not made by individuals in isolation. Others will be involved, making positive or negative contributions. With reference to educational decisions such influences may be divided into formal sources, those made available within the education system, and informal sources, family, friends and associates. Roberts and Higgens(1992 ibid p. 29) in their study attempted to identify those who advise HE applicants about their decision -making The results are summarised in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9 Discussed higher education plans before applying with ...

	All %
Careers advisor (LEA)	44
Careers teacher	37
Head/principal	13
Form/housemaster	22
Subject teacher	29
None of above	20

(From Roberts and Higgens 1992 ibid p30)

The evidence shows that 80% of the sample took advice from teachers or careers advisors . Almost half spoke to more than one advisor. For the 'traditional' student the form and subject teacher were influential in addition to the careers teacher, while LEA careers officers were also significant. 20% of school leavers had sought no advice. Findings for mature students in the same study .(Roberts and Higgens 1992 ibid p.102) however, show that 55% of this group had not sought any formal advice. Dominant advisors for this group had been LEA careers officers, careers teachers in FE and subject teachers from previous courses. Overall the mature students rated the information given more highly than did the younger students. The study did not cover alternative sources from which students might have sought advice such as Education Advice centres or Job Centres, for example.

Roberts and Higgens are critical of the formal sources of advice available to young people. (Roberts and Higgens 1992 ibid p. 120) They argue that the variety of different sources of specialist for advice available at different stages, the fact that staff who have the most frequent contact with pupils may not be the most effective source of advice, the lack of knowledge of and guidance about higher education at 16+ and earlier and the dissatisfaction of the client group combine to suggest a need for a more comprehensive, continuous programme. A programme which offers continuity of advice from the same people from the age of 14.

> "This seems to contextualise the need for a continuous, client centred approach to careers and educational advice."(Roberts and Higgens 1992 ibid p. 24)

The approach is undoubtedly valid but evidence considered in this chapter suggests that parents should also be involved. Roberts and Higgens (1992 ibid p. 25) draw attention to the influences of parents and peers on the decision to enter higher education. Heathfield and Wakeford (19 ibid p.24) provide evidence of parents who were negative towards education while Pascal and Cox (p.39) quote parents who lacked the knowledge or educational background to provide the support their offspring needed in order to succeed.

Mature students may be positively or negatively influenced by their spouse or partner. The negative responses of spouses towards the contributors to "Learning the Hard Way" were quoted earlier("Learning the Hard Way" ibid 1989 p.83). These are in contradiction to the findings of the Pascal and study in which husbands were found to be supportive:

> "getting married and I had my husband's support and encouragement.... he just gave me the push in the right direction. Otherwise I don't think I could have done it on my own." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p. 70)
> "Ivan said it's silly going back to work unless you are going to do something you like, and he felt he couldn't give up his work if I wasn't doing something I liked, or he would have felt guilty. So in order to do that, I'd got to get a bit further in education." (Pascal and Cox 1993 ibid p. 70)

Summary

The evidence suggests, taking higher education as a whole, that growth and change has been accompanied by increased diversification in student characteristics. Proportionate increases in the number of women, significant increases in the number of adults and grounds for optimism in the increasing number of students from ethnic minorities. Unfortunately there is little evidence of diversification in student social class. However, assumptions on the 'kind of people' who enter higher education, and the prior experiences they carry with them, can be made with considerably less certainty than might have been the case in the past. Evidence suggests that diversification developed slowly over time but with markedly increasing rapidity over the last 20 years.

The overall, broad view masks patterns of variation at various levels within the higher education system. The introduction and development of higher education outside the universities has been a major factor in diversification of student characteristics. As a generalisation, the former polytechnic sector manifests greater diversity than the 'traditional' universities across all of the student characteristics considered. The need for polytechnics to develop and to seek new markets has led to admissions policies in this sector more favourable to the non-traditional student. In recognising qualifications other than A-level and routes other than the school sixth form, for example. The evidence suggests that students seeking higher education from FE or via the vocational route using 'other' qualifications are more likely to have entered former polytechnics.

Variation at 'sector' level is also found at the level of institutions. While some institutions will have been little affected by the shift towards the 'non-traditional' student others may never have known anything else. From their inception many polytechnics are likely to have admitted a more varied student population entering via different routes and this diversification will have increased over time. Within this there are again variations however; for example, the tendency for students from ethnic minorities to apply to institutions in specified geographical locations. There is also a suggestion that some polytechnics may have developed a 'community' approach but how far this applies as a general policy throughout the sector as a whole is uncertain. The 'traditional' universities, particularly, the more prestigious, which have continued to attract the 'traditional' student, had less need to alter their existent admissions policies.

Difference in the degree of diversification is also found at the level of academic subjects or disciplines. Teacher training courses have continued to be dominated by women and will have enrolled few students from ethnic minorities, arts and social sciences areas have been attracting a diversity of students for many years, departments offering construction and related studies will have experienced little variation of any kind, remaining mainly white and male, while business studies

departments will have seen considerable diversification in student characteristics.(Modood 1993 p.175)

There is evidence of a trend towards increased participation in higher education among women though as yet they are likely to attend the less prestigious institutions, are concentrated to a larger extent in 'traditional' womens' study areas and tend to enter courses at a later stage than men. Women from working class backgrounds have little representation. The trends are still positive, in terms of both education and career opportunities, though some women might be justified in thinking that they represent a continuation of 'jam tomorrow'. Among younger students differences in subject choice continue to reflect gender stereotypes while for mature students there is continued conflict between the responsibilities associated with the 'traditional' women's role and the ability to integrate often conflicting demands. It is to be anticipated that all adults might experience similar problems in juggling the varied roles demanded of them, but this is exacerbated in the case of women.

The findings for social class offer encouragement drawn from three sources: that some students from working class backgrounds continue to succeed, that some students from ethnic minorities are able to overcome class inequalities (Modood 1993 ibid p.179)and that there is some evidence of working class students entering higher education as adults. The findings from all sources however indicate little to suggest the possibility of even 'jam tomorrow' for this group.
Halsey finds:

> "To be sure the working class child has had increased absolute chances of going into some form of higher education, though in competition with women and those from ethnic minorities. But class inequalities, measured in relative terms, have apparently remained stable for the past three generations." (Halsey 1993 ibid p.131)

Evidence drawn from student experience suggests that the process of entry to higher education commences prior to school leaving and that there are factors in the social background of students which significantly affect decision-making at this point. Effectively, some students are encouraged towards higher education during their school careers whereas others are not. Schools, despite their efforts, do not always seem to be effective in alleviating this situation. The finding of Pascal and Cox (1993) which suggests categories of parental response to school leaving for their offspring is particularly relevant as a mediating factor.

The variation in methodology employed in the analysis of social class as outlined by Drudy seems to have little significance in the case of social class and education. The unequal representation of the working class is clearly apparent across the approaches employed. Halsey however draws attention to the problems associated with variation in definitions and methodological approaches when studying inequality and when comparing research studies.

> "It is relevant to recall A.B.Atkinson's assertion that all measures of inequality involve social as well as statistical judgements (Atkinson, 1974). Interpretation is always necessary." (Halsey 1993 ibid p.130)

He further asserts that there are errors inherent in using sample surveys to estimate the state of populations. "There are different sampling errors" and there are different classifications(such as ethnic minority status). The two variations especially in combination may mislead. There may be criticism of specific of areas in the findings. For example, Halsey (1993 ibid p.130) suggests that Modood, by including Irish-born admissions among the White population, when the former are known to be lower, leads to an underestimation of White performance. Overall, however, the findings present a clear picture of increasing diversity across the higher education student population as a whole though with a variation in the pattern between sectors, institutions and academic disciplines and between the characteristics considered.

Evidence of a variety of educational routes in to higher education emerges from both quantitative and qualitative studies. Routes include, the 'traditional' student entering via the school sixth form who is more likely to be male and to go to a 'traditional university'; students who enter via FE, who are more likely to go into the former polytechnics, more likely to be adults, who may have 'struggled' to obtain O and A-levels, and are more likely to be members of ethnic minorities; 'mature' students who may have vocational qualifications, though there is some uncertainty on how they obtained these; Access courses; adults who obtained the qualifications for entry at school but chose not to use them for this purpose at that time and those who may be 'returning' to academic study for the first time since leaving school. The evidence indicates diversity of student prior experience, within diversity of student characteristics, within diversity of institutions.

Assuming the continued broad remit of teaching and research as university functions it has become as uncertain to make assumptions on 'what universities are like' as it is to draw assumptions on 'what higher education students are like'. The concepts of a higher education and of student are significantly more 'slippery' than would have been the case thirty years ago.

The effects of interconnected factors in growth and diversification in higher education are registered at the level of the individual student. Individual agency is clearly involved as represented in the aspirations of students, but whether this is turned towards entry to higher education is influenced by experiences at school and in the social milieu, particularly the family and school, and by govenment policy on higher education and the admissions policies of institutions and courses. The entry of 'mature students' to higher education is affected by factors in their lives such as employment and the need to provide care for children and, taking account of both of these, financial factors. Agency, social interaction and structure are clearly involved. A theoretical framework within which the experience of

students prior to entry to higher education can be understood in the light of the structure/agency debate is required. This is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three.
Theoretical orientation of the Study: implications for method.

In this chapter the theoretical orientation of the study utilising Bhaskar's (1979) perspective is discussed and, taking this as a framework, the use of two research methods, qualitative and quantitative is outlined.

Development of the theoretical framework of the study.

Miles and Huberman (1994 p.4) argue that researchers should make clear how they construe 'the shape of the social world". This aim is pursued in this chapter. Following Miles and Huberman (1994 ibid pp. 4-5) an argument is developed for a theoretical orientation for this study based on 'transcendental realism'. (Bhaskar 1979) Taking this as a theoretical framework for the study it is argued that issues surrounding student characteristics and issues surrounding student experience require the exploration of different kinds of questions involving different kinds of phenomena. Assuming this to be so the implementation of both quantitative and qualitative methods becomes necessary. It is further argued that the findings drawn from different empirical approaches may be drawn together to enhance and supplement each other in exploring the issues under consideration in the study.

Interest in the relationship between individual applicants and the social factors which surrounded them, first recorded as commonsense observations in the Preface (pp 1-2), was extended by the findings of the literature search. In broad terms, the literature review provided an indication of the interaction between the characteristics, experiences and biographies of the student in influencing entry to higher education. Entry was further influenced by changes in the higher education system, and variations in the admissions policies of individual institutions and courses. These, in turn, were further influenced by Government policies, social change, and the activities of interest groups. Assuming that the individual applicant was attempting to gain entry to higher education, which is voluntary and competitive, the question was raised concerning the extent to which social factors had an effect in placing them in a position to apply and how such factors functioned to support or inhibit the applicants' aspiration.

In order to explore the complex of factors involved, both individual and social, it was necessary that these factors be clarified, conceptualised, and organised into a format for empirical study. This was dealt with via two processes which were carried out at the same time and interacted with one another. First, there was consideration of the literature review to look for a pattern or patterns. Second, there was consideration of possible theoretical explanations for the relationship between individual students and the social influences surrounding them, including social structures.

Theoretically and empirically the latter leads into a number of 'dualisms'(Layder 1994 p.3), to divisions between separate and, possibly, opposing entities. Examples of such dualisms are macro/micro (and associated quantitative and qualitative methods), agency/structure, individual/society. Each of these is related to, may be seen as an aspect of, the other two dualisms, but the major initial concern of the study was the agency/structure debate. In crude form the relationship between 'voluntarism'- individual free will - on the one hand and 'social determinism' on the other. The latter concern led into the complexity of the structure/agency theoretical debate and "a disparate array of theories traditions and research". (Cohen 1989 p.10)

The relationship between individual and society is recognised as a, if not the, major problem of social theory:

> "The fundamental problem of linking human agency and social structure stalks through the history of sociological theory. Basically it concerns how to develop an adequate theoretical account which deals simultaneously with people constituting society and the social formation of human agents."(Archer 1990 p.73)

Or:

> "All the major figures (and most of the minor ones) in the history of sociological thought have understood individuals and society to be intertwined and inextricably fused." (Layder 1994 p.207)

But the nature of the relationship is the source of ongoing and extensive theoretical debate expressed also in empirical research ranging from empirical and theoretical concern with large scale social structures, for example, "systems' or institutions, or with small-scale, face-to-face, everyday interactions, and the relationship between the two.

Some considerable time was spent in exploring responses to the structure/agency debate relying heavily upon Craib's (1992) and later Layder's (1994) exhaustive reviews as guides to reading. It was found necessary to balance time and effort expended in exploring the complex and varied theoretical arguments against the demands of the study: to avoid becoming embroiled in theory *per se* rather than in theory as a framework for the study. Three gradual developments occurred. First, reading of theory suggested that in considering the influences surrounding applicants three interacting factors needed to be taken into account, the individual, (for example, Mead and 'phenomenology' (Rose 1971)) social, or group interaction (for example, Garfinkel and 'symbolic interactionism', (Hamel 1992)) and social structure, for example, Parsons and 'structural functionalism', (Craib p.41 1992)). Second, analysis of the literature search indicated a pattern which could be represented in a 'model' and which took account of these three elements. This is discussed in more detail later. (Chapter 5). Third, the 'realist' approach of

Bhaskar (1979) was found to be valuable in that it took account of the macro/micro, quantitative/qualitative, method debate.

These factors, analysis of the literature search, reading of theory and the use of Bhaskar's framework, combined as a process, emerging out of study, rather than as a structured sequence of events. They provided a framework for conceptualising the study whilst maintaining an element of empirical realism. In effect, theory was used in the manner proposed by Mouzelis:

> "In that sense, sociological theory does not consist of, and does not aim directly at establishing testable hypothesis, it is merely meant to prepare the ground for an empirical investigation of social structure and actors." (Mouzelis 1993 p.676)

Structure/agency: a 'realist' perspective.

Outhwaite summarises two divergent, fundamental, theoretical perspectives in the structure agency debate:

> "In a sociology of system, then, social actors are pictured as being very much at the receiving end of the social system. In terms of their existence and nature as social beings, their social behaviour and relationships, and their sense of personal identity as human beings are determined by it. The process is one whereby they are socialised into society's central values and into the norms appropriate to the roles they are to play in the division of labour ....
> In total opposition to this, a sociology of action conceptualises the social system as derivative of social action, a social world produced by its members, who are thus pictured as active, purposeful, self and socially-creative beings."(Outhwaite 1990 pp. 366-367)

To such 'holistic' theories, and 'individualistic' approaches, can be added formulations which argue that individuals create society and society creates individuals, (Craib 1992 ibid p.18). Bhaskar is critical of all three such approaches. He argues that they make a fundamental error in regarding individuals, agents, and societies as beings of the same order.

> "People and society are not, I shall argue, related 'dialectically'. They do not constitute two moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different kinds of thing." (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.42)

Bhaskar argues that there is something other than individuals and collectivities which is recognisable, *sui generis*, in its own right, as 'society'. This must necessarily predate individuals and therefore is not of their creation, since all human activity pre-supposes the existence of social forms. For example:

> "People cannot communicate except by utilising media, produce except by applying themselves to materials which are already formed, or act save in some or other social context. Speech requires language; making materials; actions conditions; agency resources; activity rules." (Bhaskar 1979 ibid. p.43)

It does not necessarily follow, however, that society is impervious to human wishes or activity nor that it exerts a coercive power or determines human behaviour. Although 'ready-made', society could not continue to exist without human activity and unless those engaged in it had some conception of what they were doing. Individuals therefore do not create society but, through their activity, they perpetuate it and have the potential to transform it.

> "Society stands to individuals, then as something that they never make but that exists only in virtue of their activity." (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.42)

Society provides the raw materials, the necessary preconditions, which individuals work on and with, to perpetuate and, potentially, bring about transformations.

> "Society is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and the continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency". (Bhaskar 1979 ibid. p.43)
> *"the material presence of society = persons and the material results of their actions."* (Bhaskar 1979 ibid. p.37)

Society is therefore comprised of the relations between people, and people and their products:

> " .... persistent relations between individuals and groups, and with the relations between these relations (and between such relations and nature and the products of such relations.)" (Bhaskar 1979 ibid. p. 35)

Since social structures owe their reproduction, and potentially, transformation, to human activity, they too are social products. In making these products human activity must also produce the conditions in which they are made. Social structures can only, therefore, be relatively enduring. (Bhaskar ibid p.48) Structures are not fixed dominant entities and though they impose limits do not determine performance. Language rules, for example, exist independently of usage but they do not determine what is said.(Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.45) Social structures must therefore be enabling, as well as restrictive of action. Society may therefore be defined as:

> " ... an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce, transform, but which would not exist unless they did so." (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.45)

Within this framework human meanings and intentions are worked out. (Miles and Huberman 1994 ibid p.4) These structures are invisible, like a magnetic field (Bhaskar ibid. p.57), but nonetheless 'real'. Society can only be identified, like a magnetic field, by its effects, "it can only be known, not shown to exist".(Bhaskar ibid p.57) But social phenomena such as language and hierarchies:

> "... exist objectively in the world and exert strong influences over human activities because people construe them in common ways."(Miles and Huberman 1994 ibid p.4)

Just as people are surrounded by "lawful physical mechanisms" of which they are at most "remotely aware" (Miles and Huberman 1994 ibid p.4) so their degree of awareness of social structures and of their influences will vary.

Whereas societies are characterised by relationships, Bhaskar argues that people are of a different order, exhibit different characteristics and cannot be conceptualised in the same way. In Bhaskar's view, human behaviour is characterised by intentionally (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.44) which, dependent to some degree on neuro-physiological complexity, facilitates the ability to initiate change in a purposeful way as well as the capability to monitor, and to monitor the monitoring of performance. Individuals have the ability to reflect and produce a commentary on their actions, albeit with varying degrees of perspicacity, sophistication and frameworks of understanding. These properties are not characteristic of a society. In this conscious activity people reproduce and may also transform society, though they may not always be aware of doing so. Bhaskar (Bhaskar ibid p. 44) cites the example of people who marry and in doing so perpetuate the nuclear family, but this was not their reason for marrying, or work to sustain the capitalist economy though this was not their reason for working. But, the reproduction and transformation of society, Bhaskar (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.46) emphases, is a skilled performance, though often unconsciously achieved, by active agents. It does not occur as a mechanical response to pre-existent conditions.

If one accepts that people and society are of a different order then there must be processes by which the relationship between the two come together: what Bhaskar refers to as "a system of mediating concepts" (Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.50) The skills, competencies and habits, appropriate to particular social contexts, and necessary for the reproduction and possible transformation of society are acquired through the ongoing process of socialisation and induction.

The contact point linking human agency to social structure must, Bhaskar argues, both endure and be capable of immediate occupation by individuals. He argues that the mediating system is made up of :

> "positions (places, functions, rules, tasks, duties, rights, etc.) occupied (filled, assumed, enacted, etc.) by individuals and of the practices

> (activities, etc.) in which by virtue of these positions (and vice versa), they engage."(Bhaskar 1979 ibid p.51)

Such positions and practices can only become operationally enacted, relationally. Thus, individual agency, characterised by intentionality, is linked to social structures, characterised by the relational. It is in understanding these relations, Bhaskar argues, that the study of sociology lies.

In terms of this study, and of the related literature search, Bhaskar's perspective 'prepares the ground'(Mouzelis 1993 ibid p. 676) and provides a conceptual framework in which to operate. 'Voluntarism' is avoided since the influences on applicants of others and of social structures is recognised. Alternatively entry to higher education is not socially determined, though the significance of structural factors is recognised. The influence of small scale interaction in, for example, families and schools, can also be taken into account. The student is not reduced to the 'cultural dope' suggested by Garfinkel (Collins 1992 p.87, 88). Intentionality, and human action as agency, make it possible to retain the applicant as central thus avoiding the 'death of the subject', subsumed in social interaction. (Mouzelis 1993 ibid p. 685) In recognising the difference between agency and structure allowance is made for the contribution of empirical study at both a macro and micro level whilst avoiding the problem of attempting to squeeze both into the same conceptual framework. Finally, each applicant can be conceptualised as an agent, carrying the 'baggage' of experience, gained in particular sub-structures such as education, and thence actively seeking to develop, or change, their 'position' in society as a result of the perceived benefits accruing from higher education.

Implications for method.

Developing theory into empirical research in terms of this study demonstrated the need to ask different kinds of questions. Interest in the changing characteristics of the student population lent itself to, or required quantification, for example, how many students in the sample possessed specified characteristics for purposes of comparison with the changing patterns in higher education as indicated by the literature search. The second aspect, that of comparing characteristics with prior experience, is more problematic, however, since human experience is not always readily expressed in numerical terms. Data on 'what' an individual has experienced can be obtained by quantitative means, for example, what kind of school they attended, whether they attended courses in FE or whether they studied full-time or part-time, can be developed into an educational 'biography' and indicate which route they followed to enter HE. Experience in this form can be gathered via a questionnaire. But the content of experience and its effects, cognitive, emotive or motivational, the meanings attributed to the experience, of, for example, a particular route into HE or elements of such a route, are less amenable to quantification. These aspects required qualitative exploration. The application of both quantitative and qualitative methods was therefore required.

Bhaskar's (1979) perspective recognises the difference, though inter-relationship, between structure and agency. It is argued that viewed within this perspective the differences, though inter-relationship, between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms can also be taken into account. In terms of this study no attempt is made to reconcile these differences: they are irreconcilable in the sense that they deal with different things. But it is argued that a recognition of differences and of the strength of contribution, and shortcomings, of both approaches makes it possible to explore and relate together aspects of student characteristics and experiences prior to entry to university.

Cohen and Manion (1992 p.6) express the differences between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms in terms of different conceptions of social reality. For the positivist, operating in a 'natural sciences' tradition, there is a 'reality' which exists independently of people but which can be discovered by people using their senses and observing. Discoveries can be expressed as factual statements:

> "To the positivist the world is rational, it makes sense, and, given sufficient time and effort, it should be possible for it to be understood through patient research." (Bassey 1991 ibid section 8.3)

With reference to educational research, Bassey (1991 ibid Section 7) argues that the primary difference between the two paradigms is the desire to generalise on the basis of findings. The positivist seeks to assess the relationships between variables through objective, value free, observation. The reliable and valid measurement of constructs and collection of numerical data analysed through statistical procedures is expected to support the search for law-like regularities. The social world can be understood in much the same way as the natural world.

The qualitative researcher perceives the social world to be of a different order to the natural world to the extent that it can be neither understood nor studied in the same way. Social reality is not 'out there', existing irrespective of people but is a construct of the human mind.

> "People perceive and so construct the world in ways which are often similar but not necessarily the same." Bassey (1991 ibid 8.10)

These constructions occur within cultural, social and historical relationships. (Henwood and Nicholson 1995 p. 109). The researcher cannot 'stand outside' the reality of the social world since they are a part of it and it is affected by and affects them. The data collected is not numerical but verbal, or verbal representation of behaviour.

> "By the term qualitative research we mean any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification." (Strauss and Corbin 1990 p.17)

The results are largely interpretive and the requirement for replication and generalisation reduce in significance since there are no 'general laws' to be sought.

The quantitative researcher can lay claim to 'hard', generalisable data which can be verified and its reliability argued via sophisticated statistical techniques. Findings may still be fallible and open to interpretation but there is a 'common ground' of concepts and techniques between researchers which provide a basis for assessment and discussion. Qualitative methods present greater problems in terms of reliability and validity. This leads Miles and Huberman to suggest that:

> "Seen in traditional terms the reliability and validity of qualitatively derived findings can be seriously in doubt..." and "... a deep dark question about qualitative studies remains." (Miles and Huberman ibid 1994 p.2)

They summarise problematic issues which surround qualitative research to include:

> ".... the labour-intensiveness (and extensiveness over months or years) of data collection, frequent data overload, the distinct possibility of researcher bias, the time demands of processing and coding data, the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be managed, the generalisability of findings, the credibility and quality of conclusions, and their utility in the world of policy and action."(Miles and Huberman 1994 ibid. p.2)

In response to these criticisms the researcher in the qualitative paradigm can offer a collection of alternative values to a quantitative approach. These values include the proximity to a 'local' situation, rather than use of the mail or telephone, ongoing flexibility in developing data collection, increased time permitting the study of processes, the 'richness' available through 'thick description', the opportunity for studying 'lived experience' and therefore the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives (Miles and Huberman 1994 ibid p.10) All provide data and possible insights which are difficult if not impossible to obtain via quantitative methods.

Representation of the two research paradigms as dichotomous remains. "Fierce battles have been fought on this topic." (Miles and Huberman ibid 1994 p. 40) In their argument for a 'new paradigm' in research in psychology Harre and Gillett (1994 pp 1- 17) refer to the 'clash of paradigms' in criticising both experimental, "old paradigm", "positivist", and cognitive psychology. Adopting Bhaskar's theoretical perspective, however, it is argued that quantitative and qualitative research methods study different, though interrelated and interacting, phenomena. Both paradigms, with their advantages and shortcomings, offer different, though equally valuable interpretations.

Miles and Huberman (ibid 1994 p.4), echoing Bhaskar's perspective, argue that:

> "... social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world - and that some lawful and reasonably stable relationships are to be found among them. The lawfulness comes from regularities and sequences that link phenomena together."

Arguing on this basis, findings drawn from each paradigm may be compared or both paradigms might be applied in the same research study. Strauss and Corbin suggest that:

> "The two types of methods can be used effectively in the same research project." ... "One might use qualitative data to illustrate or clarify quantitatively derived findings; or, one could quantify demographic findings. Or, use some form of qualitative data to partially validate one's own qualitative analysis." (Strauss and Corbin ibid 1990 p.18)

An alternative approach is the use of a survey to provide a broad picture of a phenomenon and a qualitative study to cover a more limited area of the same ground or to use two aspects of a study to ask distinct questions about the same research area (Mason 1994 p.90 in Bryman and Burgess ed.). Woods, working within an interactionist framework, argues that it is not essential to create the impression that distinctive, sometimes apparently oppositional forces, are working in tension with each other:

> "There is another alternative, which is to take both into consideration, and there are signs that theories and arguments gather strength when this is done. Hence macro theories can be reinforced by sound ethnographic data. But the micro situation can only be understood properly if it is realised that there are sinews and filaments in it that reach out into the wider world."(Woods 1983 p.178)

Miles and Huberman (1994 ibid p.41), though working within a qualitative paradigm, are supportive of links between qualitative and quantitative research, offer support for this approach and indicate a number of alternative research designs via which effective linkage might be carried out. Henwood and Nicholson (1995 ibid p.109) argue, in broad terms, that the two paradigms lead to a greater diversity of approaches and methods together with a critical awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and that researchers "may often wish to argue for a principled mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods".

Summary.

Bhaskar's (1979) perspective constitutes the substantive theoretical orientation within which the study is placed. Within this relational framework it is possible to recognise the individual as an agent but to take account of the influences of small-scale interaction and of social structures. Recognition of the differences between agency and structure, whilst taking account of their interdependence, facilitates the

application of quantitative and qualitative methods in formulating the different questions demanded in exploring the issues involved in the study. The means adopted to link together the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study is dealt with in the next chapter (Chapter 4. Method).

Chapter Four. Method

The issues which the study set out to explore are stated in Chapter 1:

- diversity of student characteristics
- aspects of student experience prior to entry, including the education routes followed into higher education
- student expectations of higher education

This chapter details the method employed to carry out the study. Method is placed within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, the design and content of the questionnaire (qualitative element) and focus group interviews (quantitative element) are described and the samples, data gathering procedures, contexts, validity and reliability and methods of analysis for each element of the study are considered. Each element of the study is first discussed in isolation. The means by which the two elements were related together is then explained with the support of a schematic representation (Figure 4.1 p.77).

Quantitative element.

Questionnaire design and content.

The questionnaire was developed from the literature review (Chapter 2), the personal experience of the researcher (Preface) and discussion with university staff. A summary of questionnaire content is provided below and a copy of the questionnaire is appended (Appendix 2).

The questionnaire was designed to gather data on student experiences up to the point of gaining entry to higher education. A further factor in design was an attempt to devise a 'biographical' framework. The aim was to obtain an indication of the pattern of aspects of student experience, 'what had happened' to students in selected areas, prior to the commencement of their study programme. The data was not intended to be comparable with that which would be obtained from in-depth interview techniques with individuals but to allow for a search for patterns. These might then be seen against student characteristics.

In the light of this biographical intention the questionnaire was divided into six sections:

1. Course and Personal details
2. Occupational Background
3. Educational experience
4. Advice, Guidance, information and influences
5. Finance
6. Accommodation

Section 1 requested what were considered to be salient student characteristics:

- course and subjects studied.
- gender, requested during data collection or obtained from course lists
- ethnic origin (using the same format as the university application form)
- age, in 5 year time spans from 'under 20' to 'over 50'
- disability, both registered and not registered
- family responsibilities including children and other dependants

Section 2 was concerned with occupational background

Data on the occupational background of students was included to embrace an important area of 'life experience'. It included both employment and unemployment, and the vocational skills, expertise and responsibilities which students brought with them to their university experience. The occupational titles of the student and both of their parents were requested. The latter information was requested in order to obtain an indication of student social class background. The effect of employment and unemployment on the decision to enter higher education was also explored.

Consequently data was gathered on:

- employment experiences, including duration, breaks in employment for family responsibilities including child-rearing, and the effects of employment experiences on the decision of students to enter higher education.
- the occupational titles of the student, their mother and their father. (These were used as the basis for social class analysis as well as an indication of the type of work in which students had been involved.)
- experience of unemployment, including the number of times unemployed and duration, and the effects of unemployment experiences on the decision of students to enter higher education.
- experience of Government Training Schemes and work experience
- the effects of employment and unemployment on the decision of students to return to education
- the extent to which students experienced discrimination in employment.

Section 3 Educational Experience.

This section was designed to structure student experiences into a 'flow chart', or 'trace' format partly to support the general 'biographical framework' of the instrument but in addition to attempt to isolate the 'routes' followed by students through the education system prior to entry to university. Question content offered respondents alternatives at the various stages of the education system from statutory school leaving age onwards and included open and distance learning, and vocational training.

Students were also asked to provide information on qualifications obtained, using the format offered on the university application form. Students who left school without the qualifications required for entry to higher education were asked how long it had taken them to obtain these.

Section 4. Advice, guidance, information and influences.

This section explored the sources of advice, guidance and information used by students in entering higher education and the people who influenced their decision. Sources and influences were divided into the formal, (educational and other institutions offering information, advice and guidance) and informal, (family members, friends, work colleagues and others).

Included in this section also was a question on why the students had chosen this particular university. The concern was less with the direct responses to the question and more with the indications which could be drawn from them; the factors which the students had taken into account when making their choice of institution.

Section 5. Finance.

In this section data was gathered on:

- the sources of finance used by students to fund their education immediately prior to and during their current programme of study
- the ease or difficulty they had experienced in obtaining funding for both of these
- the extent to which students expected to have difficulties in completing their current study programme given the funding available to them
- factors relating to part-time work as an additional source of finance.

Section 6. Accommodation

Information on accommodation was included in part to relate the findings to student characteristics but also to explore the extent to which students with family commitments were separated from their families in order to follow their chosen study programme.

The questionnaire was designed to be administered 'face to face' with members of the sample by the researcher who was to remain present throughout completion. Time was negotiated for, and with the students, to complete the questionnaire. The availability of time and the support of the researcher made it possible to produce a more comprehensive and lengthier document than would have been the case if the questionnaire had been intended for distribution by mail, internal to the university or external, to individual students. It also made it possible to explain the purposes

of the exercise directly to students, to deal with queries and to monitor the response of the students to the task.

The questionnaire was designed to be 'read', largely, by an Optical Mark Reader(OMR). Exceptions to this technique included responses to questions on occupational titles (Questionnaire Section 2) and those questions to which students were offered the opportunity to add other responses in addition to those alternatives listed in a question. (Questionnaire Section 4. Questions 1, 2, and 3, for example) These could not be read by the OMR and were dealt with manually by the researcher. All analysis beyond the OMR stage was carried out by the researcher.

Pilot study.

In all six drafts of the questionnaire were produced. A pilot study was conducted at draft 5, report appended (Appendix 3). The participants were obtained by asking for volunteers from a large lecture group (approximately 150) of third year students. Students from this year group were not included in the study but had been through the experiences being studied. The pilot study was carried out on January 26. 1993 with two small groups of students, one in the morning and one during the afternoon. Small groups were selected in order to facilitate discussion. Participants in the pilot study found that, relevant to their experience, the areas included in the questionnaire were appropriate but suggested changes and additions in content and wording in response to which some modifications were carried out in the formulation of draft 6 of the questionnaire. The discussion which developed during the pilot study indicated the range of experiences to be found among the students and supported the inclusion of a qualitative research element.

The Sample. Students and Programmes of Study.

The institution in which the study was carried out was formerly a polytechnic which became a university in 1991. The Prospectus presents an encouraging attitude towards the widening of the characteristics of student population. In stating entry requirements flexibility of approach is emphasised. The entry requirements listed include points equivalents for A-level and AS-Levels, BTEC and GNVQ Advanced, Access to Higher Education Certificate and a range of international qualifications. The university emphasises:

> "All applications are considered on their individual merits. These requirements (as listed in the Prospectus and summarised above) are given as a **guide only** (document emphasis) . Admissions tutors will take into account a variety of factors when making offers. Any appropriate qualification and experience may be considered as suitable preparation for a programme of study." (Prospectus. Inside back page).

This stance was supported by an equal opportunities statement (university prospectus p.35) and by a statement of encouragement to mature students(Prospectus p 39), over the age of 21 who, the Prospectus claims, constitute 45 per cent of the student body.

The study sample comprised 251 students, all full-time, who commenced their university programme at the start of the academic year 1991/1992. It was drawn from three programmes of study all operating within the School of Education but differing in a number of respects.

The B Ed Primary and B Ed Secondary programmes are both initial teacher training courses which offer first degrees in education and, as their titles indicate, prepare students to work in primary or secondary schools. The third programme included in the sample is the Modular Degrees and Diplomas Scheme (referred to throughout this study, including charts and tables, as MODDS) which offers students the opportunity to design a programme of study most appropriate to their particular academic, career and personal goals. Subjects can be studied from all of the Schools of the University, either in combination with each other or, in many cases, as specialised awards. "Indeed the Scheme offers the largest number of subject choices among British Universities"(University Prospectus). At the time when the study was carried out nearly a quarter of the University's students chose to study via the MODDS format. The programme duration is 2 to 4 years full-time or 5 to 6 years part-time, though this varies dependent upon choice of studies. All of the MODDS students in the sample had chosen educational studies as part of their study programme. This should not be taken to imply that they would choose teaching as a career.

Teacher Education Courses

Entry requirements for the courses in the study mirror university policy. Subject point requirements for A-level are listed in the university prospectus for the B Ed Primary course but a variety of other qualifications are listed as acceptable and applications from "mature people (over the age of 21)" are "positively" welcomed. Applicants in this category are interviewed and "may be accepted without the standard requirements." For entry to the B Ed Secondary programme

> "Particular point scores are not considered relevant as a wide range of offers is made; factors include subject choice, the interviews, and relevant extra-curricula activities."

Entry requirements for MODDS are not listed as differing from university general requirements.

The Primary B Ed course was of 4 years duration, full-time and comprised 4 main elements: Specialist Subject Studies, Applied Subject Studies, Teaching Studies

and School Experience and Teaching Practice. The B Ed Secondary course includes 2 programmes of study in subject areas in secondary schools. A course of 4 years duration, full-time, qualifies teachers in Technology: Business Studies, Technology: Design and Technology and Mathematics. In addition the School offers a short, two year degree course with an option of a third year, full-time for honours. This course adds Modern Languages to the subject options available. To follow this shortened course students need a BTEC, HND, HNC or its equivalent in their chosen subject area whilst professional experience is a great advantage.

Data Gathering.

Data was collected from groups of students by the researcher either during a class or immediately after the close of a class. For the Primary and Secondary courses the classes were teaching groups, usually approximately 20 students. The complexity of the MODDS programme made the use of teaching groups problematic. Data was collected at the commencement of a large group teaching session. The sample is comprised of students who were present in the class on the day on which the data was collected.

Strenuous efforts were made to increase the size of the sample by re-visiting classes and distributing questionnaires to students who had not been present, or leaving questionnaires with members of staff to distribute to students. The follow up response was very poor. Only two further questionnaires were returned which were inadequately completed. They were not included in the sample.

Sample details are provided in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 All Sample: three courses.

	B Ed Primary	B Ed Secondary	MODDS	total
All course	143	114	110	367
sample	92	89	70	251
per cent	64	78	63.6	71

Data gathering was carried out between March 9. 1993 and March 26. 1993. In each instance teaching staff were approached, beforehand, by the researcher, the nature and purpose of the project was explained and, after ensuring willingness to co-operate, a date and time was negotiated.

A standardised procedure was adopted on each occasion that the questionnaire was administered. Students were presented with the questionnaire and were informed of the purpose of the study using an overhead projector slide (Appendix 4). The requirement to complete the questionnaire in accordance with the demands of the OMR was also explained using an overhead projector slide. (Appendix 5).

Students were assured that confidentiality would be maintained and that if they found any of the questions unacceptable or inappropriate they should not complete them. Respondents were given the opportunity to withdraw if they wished. Students were offered the opportunity to ask questions throughout the procedure. During the whole data collection exercise 3 students exercised the right to withdraw.

Students were not required to complete the questionnaire under "examination conditions". An informal atmosphere was encouraged once the initial explanation had been completed as this participation was considered more likely to promote higher quality responses. The researcher was available throughout to deal with queries.

Each data collection session was characterised by periods of subdued silence but on most occasions there was also an interchange of views between the students and between students and the researcher. No negative responses from students to the process were recorded though there was a sense of ambivalence from some individuals on occasion. In general students were positive and considered responses with care. Awareness of participants as to the nature of the questionnaire was characterised by one of the students who, while completing the exercise and discussing one section with the student next to her, commented "This is my life story, that's yours!"

Data analysis.

The questionnaire was devised to produce a detailed description of the characteristics and experiences of a relatively small sample. It was decided therefore to concentrate on description using spreadsheet and database.

Reliability and validity

Data gathering for the quantitative element of the study was concentrated in one area of the university and one group of courses. It is necessary to remain guarded therefore on the extent to which findings can be generalised to the student population of the institution as a whole or to higher education. Evidence, provided in the next chapter, will suggest, however, that the characteristics of the sample bear comparison with national data on the student characteristics of teacher education courses. But, 'specification' (Krueger and Morgan 1993 p.9) rather than 'generalisation' was the aim. The study was intended to be exploratory, to consider a small sample in some depth, across selected aspects of prior experience. To that extent results are recognised as provisional.

Internal to the study, attempts to take reliability and validity in to account were instituted by the following means; content, with some additions, was related to the findings of the literature review; careful, and detailed, preparation of the

questionnaire involving four experienced staff (3 senior members of the university staff, experienced in research, plus the researcher); the pilot study; the use of a single researcher and a standardised procedure for data collection; the presence of the researcher throughout data collection; were all instigated in an attempt to ensure validity and maintain reliability. Reliability and validity were therefore integrated, as an ongoing process, into the development of the study.

The Qualitative element of the Study.

The qualitative element of the study comprised focus group interviews conducted with students following Access courses in a college of further education and with school sixth formers. This element of the study was initiated through informal discussion between a senior member of the university staff and the tutor for Access courses in a local College of Further Education during which the possibility of a collaborative research project of some kind was considered. The type of project was not at that stage specified.

During the design stage of this study it became apparent that collaboration offered opportunities for introducing additional dimensions in terms of both data and method. It would have been feasible to have used the questionnaire sample as the source for individual interviews or focus groups and to have utilised responses to the questionnaire as the basis for further exploration of prior experience. However members of the questionnaire sample had already gained entry to university. The utilisation of alternative samples, aspiring to access to higher education, offered the opportunity of obtaining a perspective from those still in the process of 'prior experience' and in appropriate contexts. Responses might therefore be expected to be more immediate than those obtained from students already in university. The Access courses represented one of the 'routes' into higher education identified from the literature review and also the 'non-traditional' entrant. The schools samples were added as representative of the 'traditional' student and 'route'. The focus group interview approach could be carried out within existing resources and lent itself to administration by a single researcher.

As a result it became possible to compare data gathered from Access students, school pupils and the questionnaire sample. The way in which the elements of the study were drawn together is shown in Figure 1.1 (Chapter 2 p.6)

Focus Groups

Focus groups were developed by social scientists during the 1930s and 1940s as a non-directive approach to data collection (Krueger 1994 pp. 7-8) as an alternative, additional technique to individual interviews. Since the 1960s they have been used extensively by market researchers as a means of determining consumer views of products, or potential products.

> "In the last decade, serious applied and scholarly researchers have also discovered the technique and are now using it for data collection on a wide variety of issues and topics." (Anderson 1990 p.241)

Anderson (1990 ibid p.241) states:

> "A focus group is a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussion on a given issue or topic."

Krueger (1994 ibid p. 6) offers the following more comprehensive definition:

> "In summary a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive non-threatening environment. It is conducted with approximately 7 to 10 people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and enjoyable for participants as they share ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion."

In the same way as individual interviews, focus groups offer the opportunity to expand on and clarify responses but the focus group goes a step further in providing a situation in which the "synergy of the group adds to the depth and insight" (Anderson 1990 p.241) Further:

> "As they (participants in focus groups) hear others talk, however, they can easily identify the degree to which what they are hearing fits their situation. By comparing and contrasting, they can become more explicit about their own views. In addition, as they do express their own feelings and experiences, they may find that answering questions from the moderator and other participants makes them aware of things they had not thought of before." (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p. 17)

Morgan and Krueger argue that focus groups offer a particular perspective and are valuable in particular circumstances:

> "Clearly, the thing that distinguishes focus groups is the presence of group interaction in response to researchers questions."

> And:

> "By comparing the different points of view that participants exchange during the interactions in focus groups, researchers can examine motivation with a degree of complexity that is typically not available with other methods." (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid pp. 15-16)

> Morgan and Krueger argue that focus groups can be particularly valuable when investigating complex behaviour and motivations, and when a

> "friendly method is needed that is respectful and not condescending to" a target audience(Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p. 18)

.

An alternative approach to justifying the use of focus groups in this research is to consider occasions when the approach is not valid. Morgan and Krueger (1993 p. 11-14) list situations in which focus groups are not appropriate: when the primary intent is not research; when discussion is not an appropriate forum; when the topic is not appropriate for the participants; or when statistical data are required. In terms of this study it is argued that none of these apply: research was the aim while statistical results were not sought; discussion was an appropriate forum in which to explore the experiences of the participants and these experiences were directly applicable to the participants.

There are criticism of the approach however. Krueger (1994 ibid p.31) claims that focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry. He (Krueger 1994 ibid p.31) raises the question on whether the results of a focus group provide perceptions or whether the results were artificially developed by the interactions of group participants. He draws attention to the finding that:

> "Experts who work with small groups testify about the unpredictable nature of groups, and that group leaders or moderators can skilfully or unwittingly lead groups into decisions or consensus. Krueger (1994 ibid p.31)

The researcher took cognisance of this when designing and carrying out the data collection elements of the research.

It has also been suggested that the effectiveness of focus groups is dependent upon professional, highly skilled moderators.(Anderson 1990 ibid p.245) It may be argued that emphasis on the characteristics of the moderator may draw attention away from the more primary aims of the project in defining purposes and deciding who the participants should be. (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p.5) Of more significance than a professional focus group interviewer is a moderator who is familiar with the aims of the project, is well prepared, attentive, and experienced and skilful in working with (not necessarily leading) groups. (Morgan and Krueger ibid 1993 p.5) In terms of this study the moderator was the researcher throughout, who was committed to the aims of the project, had prepared with care, who was attentive in carrying out data collection and lays claim to be experienced in working with, and leading groups, possessing the characteristics of the sample (late adolescents and 'adults), in educational contexts.

Anderson argues that in terms of the constitution of focus groups:

> "It is a mistake generally speaking to involve people who know one another outside the group context. Such people will not benefit as much

> from the ideas of colleagues as they would from those of complete strangers." (Anderson 1990 ibid p. 244)

Morgan and Krueger however, suggest that the use of strangers in focus groups is a useful 'rule of thumb' that has become an overly rigid restriction on when to use focus groups. They argue that limiting participants in focus groups to strangers:

> "....would make it exceedingly difficult to conduct focus groups in "organisations, communities, and other ongoing social settings". (Morgan and Krueger ibid 1993 p.6)

The problem of the inclusion of 'acquaintances' in focus groups might be alleviated by a careful approach to the selection and ordering of the questions in the interview guide, expanding the number of groups to avoid the "narrow set of concerns that may dominate a particular set of acquaintances", and to rely on the skills of the moderator to "meet the challenges imposed by such groups"(Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p.6) . Nonetheless, account must be taken of Anderson's cautionary note:

> "There is a particular danger dealing with intact groups which have evolved a life and personality of their own, which is rarely conducive to the focus group purpose."(Anderson 1990 ibid p. 244)

In this study, the participants in groups may have been known one another, some may have been friends, but no 'intact' or 'established groups were used. In accordance with the recommendations of Morgan and Krueger(Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p.6), a number of groups were used (four groups from schools and four from Access courses). Interview content and the order of questions was developed with some care.

A further criticism of focus groups is that they 'produce conformity' (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p. 7). This suggestion has arisen out of studies on group decision making. Focus groups are concerned with exploring experiences and feelings and not with decisions. When participants realise that exploration is the goal then conformity is less likely to be a problem. (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p. 7) With reference to this study, decision making was not a goal and the aims of the project were made clear to participants at the commencement of each of the group sessions.

Relative to this study, the concept of focus groups, in addition to providing an alternative, non-directive, approach to the questionnaire, lent itself to the exploration of issues and was amenable to width of coverage using the group as the unit of research (Crabtree and Miller 1992 p.16). The approach also allowed for the consideration of individual characteristics and biography. In addition, it offered a means of more direct access to student perceptions of their experiences prior to entry to university, a means of relating qualitative findings to quantitative

results and an opportunity to compare the experiences of groups of 'non-traditional' with 'traditional' students.

Reliability and validity

In common with other qualitative methods, focus groups present problems in terms of validity and reliability. The problems of reliability and validity, and some of the perceived values, associated with qualitative research in general were alluded to in Chapter 3 (p.51) of this study. Much of the dissensus in terms of validity revolves around the 'generalisablility' of the results: the extent to which the results can be externally generalised to similar situations or can be recognised 'internal' to the study in understanding the behaviour of the particular groups being observed. Morgan and Krueger (1993 ibid p.9), for example, cite a further criticism of focus groups, that they need to be validated against other methods. This represents an element in the discussion developed in Chapter 3(p. 50) of this study on the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods. All qualitative methods may be reduced to a preliminary role that prepares the way for 'real research'. Morgan and Krueger (1993 ibid p.9) draw attention again to the difference in types of research question: 'what-and-how-many questions' need to use different methods to 'how-and-why questions'.

> "When the goal is specification rather than generalisation, focus groups and other qualitative methods are the appropriate tools." (Morgan and Krueger 1993 ibid p.9)

The concern of this study is 'specification' rather than 'generalisation' and, therefore, in common with the approach adopted towards reliability and validity for the quantitative element the primary concern is with factors internal to the study.

Many of the concerns of reliability and validity were dealt with in the last section in attempting to overcome the criticisms directed towards the use of focus groups as a method, for example, arguing the validity of the focus group approach in this context, avoiding the use of 'intact' groups whilst recognising the possibility that members of groups might be acquaintances, the researcher's claim to experience in working with groups and with groups sharing the characteristics of the sample, in addition, the use of 8 groups, 4 in each category.

Krueger states, in terms of focus groups, that he "finds it useful" to explain validity in the sense that:

> "Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry" (Krueger 1994 ibid p.31)

It has been argued here that, with reference to this study, the approach has been used carefully and that a focus group approach is suitable for the investigation undertaken. However, Krueger's (Krueger 1994 ibid p.31) wider approach was adopted. Avoiding the cynicism which assumes that nothing is valid, avoiding "optimistic faith" in measuring instruments, "that if a procedure has been developed by leading experts it must be "valid" and adopting a "middle ground"; taking some faith in the method adopted but treating all results with a "healthy scepticism".

Negotiating access.

Access to the college of further education had already been agreed and further negotiation was informal. A proposed structure and content was prepared and discussed with the Access courses tutor who agreed to provide a room and arrange for 4 groups of mixed gender, of approximately 8 students, 2 groups following pre-Access courses and 2 following the Access course itself.

Access to the four secondary schools required a more formal procedure. Four schools were approached based on the advice of the Co-ordinator, Supervised Teaching Experience (Secondary) in the university on their likely willingness to be interviewed. A procedure for arranging the interviews was then formulated comprising telephone contact, a meeting with a representative in the school, at which an information package was presented, leading to an opportunity to carry out the interviews. The details of the procedure are appended (Appendices 6 (a) and 6 (b)). All of the schools approached agreed to take part.

Interview design and content.

The general aims for each interview were to develop a structured, purposeful discussion, to avoid interviewer control or domination of the situation, to involve the students, and to maintain the "flow" of interaction by following the lead offered by the students in exploring a content area. At the same time it was necessary to ensure that the areas of interview content were covered by, for example, asking supplementary questions, returning to an area which had not been adequately covered or choosing appropriate times to change the topic area. All of the content areas were discussed in each group but the extent and depth of coverage shows some variation. There is compensation for this however when each of the areas is considered across all of the groups.

The duration of about an hour for each group interview was selected as sufficient to gather the data required, appropriate to retain student interest and concentration, sufficient to maintain meaningful dialogue and acceptable to the institutions and the participants, given timetable commitments. Interview content was devised to reflect the differing experiences of the two categories of student. In each instance broad areas of content were produced, four in the case of Access

students and five for schools, within which further aspects to 'probe', or consider in more depth, were included.

Direct relationships with questionnaire content were not made in the broad areas of the interviews but it was anticipated that commonalities would emerge during the interviews. Aspects of occupational background, educational experiences, influences, finance and accommodation included in questionnaire content were expected to derive from the interviews (see Figure 1.1 p.3) Two additional areas were introduced which were not included in the questionnaire: student expectations of university and student aspirations beyond university. These were included as appropriate areas to consider using this method, as relevant to the groups of students at this stage in their education, as appropriate areas in which to compare 'non-traditional' and 'traditional' students, and as a means of exploring the influence of the perceived outcomes of higher education on prospective applicants.

Access: content areas.

1. Why the students came back in to education and what they were doing before.
Probing for:
their situation when they made the decision to return, the factors which influenced that decision, whether they were working and what kind of job they were doing.
2. What the students had gained from the course.
Probing for:
the students' views of what counts as gained, sources of support and advice, obstacles and problems.
3. What do the students think university will be like?
Probing for:
those aspects of university which they see as significant, obstacles and problems, work, both quantity and level, people, both students and staff.
4. Aspirations.
Students were asked where they saw themselves in 5 years time.
Probing for:
outcomes, what they hope to gain, their view of careers.

Schools: content areas.

The interview was designed to cover 5 broad areas:
1. Staying on at school.
Why did you decide to stay on at school?
probing for:
when did they start to consider the decision, when did they arrive at the decision, who was involved, who did they perceive to be influential, who did they seek advice from, what sorts of things influenced the decision, did they consider any alternatives and what were they, had anyone else in the family stayed on at school?

2. Higher Education.
Why did you decide to go into university?
probing for:
when did they start to consider the decision, when did they arrive at the decision, who was involved, who did they perceive to be influential, who did they seek advice from, what sorts of things influenced the decision, did they consider any alternatives and what were they, had anyone in their family been to university, did they know anyone who had been to university?
3. Why did you choose a particular institution?
probing for:
factors which influenced their choice, what they took into account
e.g. the reputation of a particular institution(are students aware of a "league table" of HE institutions) facilities, a particular course, subjects, distance from home, social life, other factors
4. What do you think university will be like?
probing for:
views of university life, any feedback they have received, what their view of university is based on, fears and concerns(e.g. finance, coping with the work, coping with new people and new situations) sense of anticipation, what they hope to get out of university while they are there. Academic versus instrumental viewpoints (education "for its own sake" /education as "a means to an end")
5. Aspirations
Where will you be in 5 years time?
probing for outcomes, in terms of what they hope to gain
their view of work and careers (evidence of positive or negative views of graduate employment)
evaluation of university experience and qualifications.

Data Gathering.

Data was collected from the Access and schools groups on the dates shown: Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Dates: focus group interviews.

Access		Schools	
Group	**Date**	**Group**	**Date**
A	4/5/93	**A**	10/10/94
B	11/4/93	**B**	11/10/94
C	23/5/94	**C**	9/11/94
D	23/5/94	**D**	7/12/94

The data gathering exercise was carried out in the four schools at about the same time, when the process of application was significant to the participants, dependent on date and time convenient to the school. It was more convenient for the college to produce two groups at a time. In consequence the exercise was carried out in consecutive academic years.

Efforts were made to standardise data gathering procedures for all of the interviews. The introductory format was similar for both Access and schools interviews but with some variation in content. The participants were all volunteers but were offered the opportunity to withdraw following the introductory explanation and were assured of confidentiality. No students took up the option to withdraw.

The introduction of a brief questionnaire to record some basic information for comparison with the quantitative element, for example, gender, racial origin and, in the case of the Access students, former occupation, was considered (Anderson 1990 ibid p. 225). The proposal was excluded on the grounds that it would detract from the spontaneity of the interviews and that sufficient appropriate information could be obtained during the course of the interview.

Introductory statement: Access interviews .

The format and content which follows was presented at each interview, not verbatim, with very minor variations.

1. Researchers name and status. Who am I?

The interviewer provided his name and status.

2. The purpose of the interview. Why am I here?

The fact that the study was being conducted on behalf of the university was stressed - "official university research". The population of universities has in recent years begun to change in mainly 2 ways:

- more mature students are entering higher education
- they are entering by a variety of routes, in addition to the "traditional A-level route"

The university therefore wants to know more about its students, about the experiences that they bring to university with them and about how they see their future.

3. What are we going to do?

I shall ask some questions or make some statements and ask for your views, opinions, comments, any contribution you may wish to make. I am interested in your personal views and experiences so there are no right or wrong answers. I am less interested in the course you are on now and more in the ways in which you come to be here and where you see yourself going.

4. Use of tape recorder.

The proceedings will be taped but I shall not be asking for your names and no one will be able to identify you.

5. Opportunity to withdraw.

Now that you know what this is all about and what is going to happen you are free to withdraw. No students chose to withdraw.

Interviews A and C involving students who were following the 'full' Access course were opened in the same way:

> "You get chatting to someone in a pub, on a 'bus, cafe, whatever and you start to tell them about the course. They think that it is something that they would like to do. What advice would you give them?"

The "opener" was selected in order to reassure the students that content would not be threatening, to set an informal atmosphere and to put the students in control of the situation through offering their valid experience to someone else.

The other 2 interviews, Interviews B and D, were opened by asking students how long they had been on the course, followed by what they were doing before, as an 'opener', the aim being to introduce the interview with the students' most immediate experiences.

Introductory statement: schools interviews

The format and content which follows was presented at each interview with minor variations, though not verbatim.

1. Researcher's name and status. Who am I?

2. The purpose of the interview. Why am I here?

A 3 year research study at the University which is concerned with higher education and in particular with students. Over recent years the population of higher education has changed and is continuing to change and to grow. In consequence universities need to know more about their students, the kind of people who are coming in to universities, why they come, what they are hoping to get while they are on a course and what they hope will result at the end.

3. Structure. (What are we going to do?)

I am going to ask for your views on higher education and your experiences as you have prepared to go into higher education. There are no right or wrong answers. What you give is your opinion or your experience. I haven't asked for your names and I don't intend to do so. There is no reason for you as an individual to be identified.

4. Use of tape recorder.

I shall tape record what we all say.

All I want you to do is to express your honest opinions and state your experiences of the issues I raise.

Students were then given the opportunity to withdraw. None chose to do so.

All of the schools interviews opened with a discussion on their reasons for deciding to stay on into the sixth form: "Two years ago you could have burned your blazers or whatever, and left school for ever. Why didn't you"

Sample: Access.

Three of the Access groups(groups A, C and D) comprised random samples of volunteers who were requested by the course tutor to take part: students who happened to be in the common room at the time, shortly after taking their lunch.

This approach ensured that students took part willingly, at a time which was convenient to them, and, since the exercise was presented to the students at very short notice, that they had no knowledge of aims or content and no opportunity to prepare responses. This approach also contributed to the informal tone of the exercise which was considered desirable. Some of the students knew one another, some were friends, but they did not comprise a cohesive group following the same programme of study. They had, however, shared the common experience of the Access course.

The fourth group (Group B) comprised members of a class who were asked to take part at the end of a taught session. Spontaneity was maintained in that the students had no prior knowledge of the activity, and all agreed to take part but the size of the group was counterproductive: 5 of the students took no part in the discussion and the interviewer thought it inappropriate to ask them direct questions since they gave the impression that they had no wish to contribute. The size of the group and of the room made it difficult to draw those who were unwilling to contribute in to the discussion given the time available. The group was drawn together as members of a particular teaching session rather than course group and had known one another for only a few weeks. They did not therefore comprise a cohesive group. Results obtained were valid in the context of the study, however, since those willing to contribute created a lively and fruitful discussion. Group A was interviewed as a pilot study but as the activity was successful, the methodology did not require any change, so that the results have been used in the study.

Table 4.3 Sample. Acess: focus group interviews.

	female	male	total
Group 1	7	1	8
Group 2	5	3	8
Group 3	6	3	9
Group 4	3	5	8
total	21	12	33

Sample: Schools.

The school interviews were timed with the intention of discussing higher education with students when the subject was uppermost in their minds; either during or immediately after they were making decisions on the courses and higher education institutions to which they intended to apply. The timing proved appropriate for three of the groups which were involved in the process of making applications as anticipated. Staff at the fourth school had organised the submission of applications at an earlier date and the application process had been completed by the time of the interview. The process and related concerns remained fresh in the minds of the students, however.

Schools were asked to provide a group of mixed gender of no more than 10 students who were in the second year sixth form and were expecting to go to university. It was decided to concentrate on those students who had decided to go to university rather than to take a sample of all members of the sixth form since higher education was the major concern of the study. Three of the school staff stated that they were particularly concerned about students who had entered the sixth form but had decided not to apply for higher education. One of the staff believed that this resulted from financial factors. The researcher accepted the validity and significance of their concern but it was agreed that this constituted another research topic.

The school groups consisted of volunteers collected by the staff. They were all members of the sixth form some of whom were friends but they did not comprise established groups within the schools.

Table 4.4 Sample: Schools focus groups.

	female	male	total
school 1	7	3	10
school 2	6	4	10
school 3	6	7	13
school 4	22	20	42
total	22	20	42

Contexts: Access.

The Access course tutor arranged the interview contexts, in each case a classroom familiar to the students. The locations selected were all free of interruption, though the play school in operation in the room above presented some problems in producing the transcript of one of the interviews.

Contexts: Schools.

Each school took responsibility for arranging the context for the interview. They were requested to provide a quiet room in which students would feel reasonably relaxed (Appendix 6 (b)). All of the contexts proved suitable though there was some variation between schools. In schools 1, 2 and 4 a classroom was allocated. In school 4 the common room in the recently acquired sixth form centre was used.

Student response.

Apart from a small number of students in Access group B the response from participants was positive and co-operative. Though initially inhibited and reticent this lasted for only a short time and the students talked willingly and openly and did not seem to be inhibited by the presence of the microphone. The general atmosphere throughout the sessions was relaxed and informal, as witnessed by the

number of times when "laughter" is recorded in the interview transcripts. The students were interested in the research topic and members of three of the schools groups and one of the Access groups stayed to discuss the project with the researcher after the interview was concluded. The others had timetable commitments.

In addition to individual contributions, which were used as the main unit of analysis, group responses were also recorded during transcription. The latter took the form of group laughter, situations in which many members of the group were all making responses at the same time, or group agreement or disagreement with a question or assertion made by the interviewer or a member of the group. Pauses in the discourse were also recorded.

Qualitative Analysis.

A schematic representation of the coding procedure is offered in Figure 4.1, page 77. Analysis (stage 1) began during the interviews when a 'seating plan' was produced (Appended 7 (a) and (b)) on which each member of each group was recorded and designated a number. Notes were made during the interview and immediately after the end of the interview, before leaving the interview location. The physical characteristics of individuals were recorded; gender, physical racial characteristics and, for the Access groups, an estimate of age within a 10 year range. Other notes were also added, some related to group responses and some to aid in characterising individual students. These notes were supplemented during the transcription of the taped material.

The aims of this first stage of analysis were:

- to relate interview contributions to individual group members
- to relate contributions to student characteristics
- to facilitate comparison of contributions across interviews
- to develop biographical notes on individuals
- to obtain information for comparison with the findings from the questionnaire.

Transcription (stage 2) began immediately after the completion of each interview. The process demanded listening to the tape, often repeating sections a number of times, and reading and re-reading the text. This procedure provided an overview of content and structure. Also at this stage 'themes and patterns' and 'clusters'(Miles and Huberman pp. 246 - 248) were noted for future reference. Transcription into a word processing programme facilitated management through 'cleaning' and organising the data (Reid 1992 pp 125-145). During this process contributions were related, via the seating plan and notes, to individual students. Findings on student characteristics, and for the Access groups individual biographies, were drawn from these. The structure of the interviews also became available as the interviewer's questions, individual student contributions, group

responses, including laughter, and pauses in the interview process, were recorded and isolated by applying different fonts to the text.

Stage 3 in the process of analysis involved a first level of 'open coding' "the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of the data" (Strauss and Corbin 1990 p.62). The interest of the study was centred on the interview content areas, therefore stage 3 involved coding 'clusters' of student responses in each interview to one of the content areas, for example, why the student stayed on at school or what they were doing before the course. These coded responses were then 'cut and pasted' together for further analysis across the each set of interview groups. At this stage whole sections of the interviews, together with some isolated student responses appropriate to a content area, were drawn together into clusters. The main aim at this stage was to obtain a general description of student responses in a given content area both across the groups and to facilitate comparison between groups.

The next stage (stage 4) applied a process akin to what Strauss and Corbin(p.96) refer to as "axial coding'. Within each content area new coding categories were produced using individual student responses as the units of analysis and the data was 'cut and pasted' into a series of new sub-categories within the content areas. The aim of this stage was to break into the clusters imposed by the structure of the interview in order to review the findings and to look for new themes.

Finally, returning to each group interview as a whole, each student response was coded into discrete elements. It was necessary to move to another level of analysis because a single student response sometimes included a number of coded elements. A combination of analysis at the level of student whole responses together with elements of these responses were both necessary: the former to retain the significance of the contribution as a whole which would have become fragmented to the point of losing meaning if divided into elements, and the latter to ensure that all elements of contributions were taken into account in coding.

The next stage in analysis (stage 5) of each set of group interviews involved looking across content and sub-content for areas of emphasis or new areas which emerged during coding. Findings from the two sets of interviews were compared and finally results were compared with findings from the quantitative element of the study. The results are presented, partly as 'thick description' partly in tables, in Chapters 5 and 6.

Relating the elements of the study.

The theoretical orientation of the study was stated in Chapter 3. Bhaskar's (1979) perspective was adopted and the implications of this for method were discussed. Taking this theoretical orientation and its implications, two research methods were utilised in this study. The first, quantitative, to explore 'what' and 'how many'

questions concerning student characteristics and aspects of prior experience. The second, qualitative element, to explore many of the same content areas while encouraging participants to expand upon their responses, to explore responses in more depth than was possible within the constraints of the questionnaire format. The views and feelings of respondents, obtained via the focus group interviews and the data from the questionnaire were used for comparison and to supplement, enhance or throw light on each other while data from both of the study elements were viewed in the context of the literature review (Chapter 2). The way in which the elements of the study were related together is represented in Figure 1.1 p 3. This forms the basis for the discussion which follows.

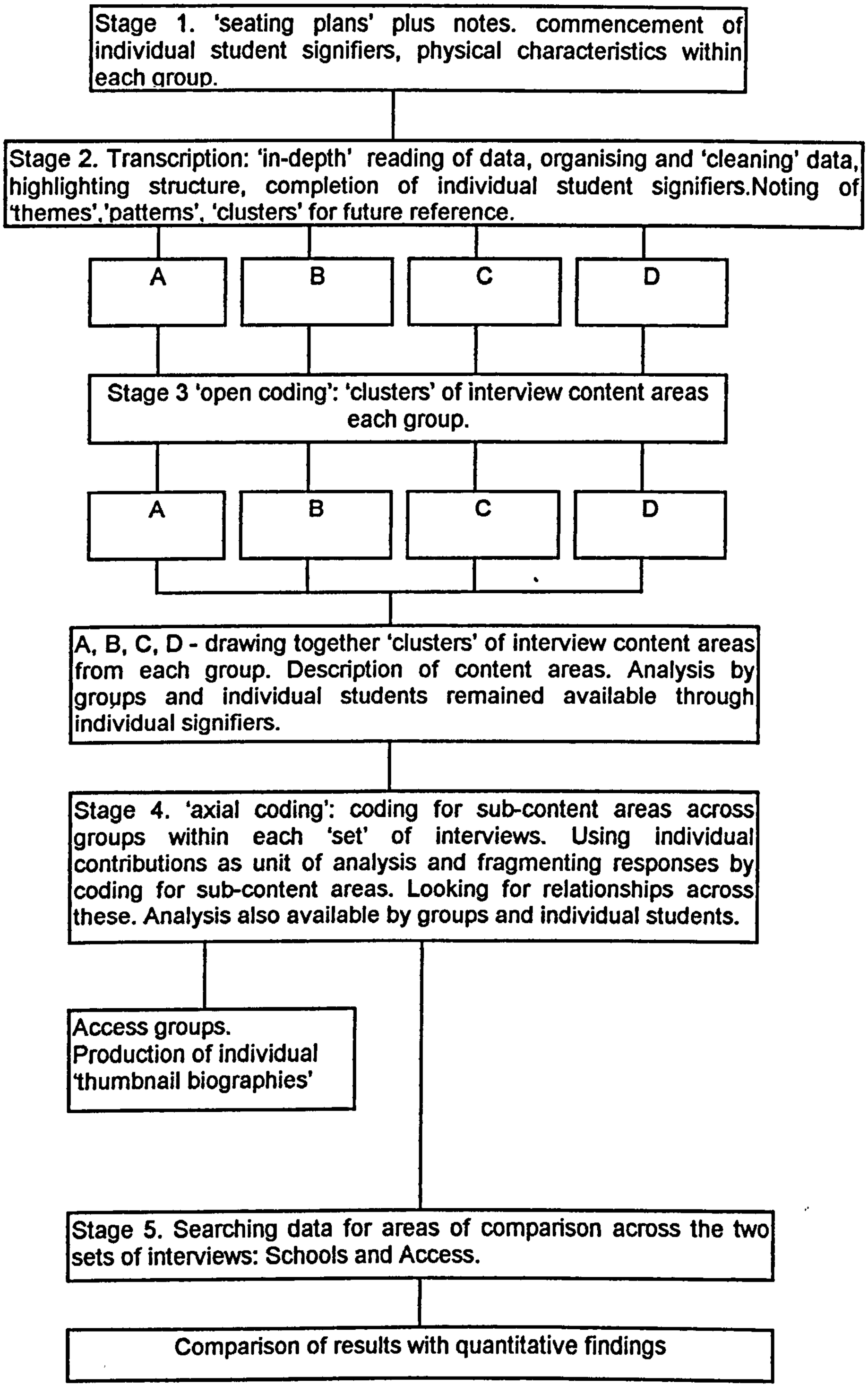
Figure 1.1 (p.3) shows the content of each of the study components. Content varied specific to each component of the study but there were also 'shared' areas (the section of the Figure headed 'Points of triangulation'). These areas of 'shared' content were designed into the study for purpose of comparison and to look for enhancement and support. With reference to the significance of age on entry to higher education, for example, the aim was to relate statistical data drawn from the literature review (Chapter 2), to the evidence from the questionnaire and so place the sample in a national context, then to relate findings on age from the questionnaire to aspects of prior experience, also included in the questionnaire. Finally to explore what age 'meant', in the context of prior experience, to samples of prospective higher education students via the focus group interviews. By this process variations in prior experiences between 'younger' and 'older' students, and their views and feelings on aspects of these experiences were drawn together from the two elements of the study and could be seen in the context of the literature review.

Each 'shared' content area was subjected to the process as outlined above. With reference to educational experiences(the second of the 'shared areas'), the questionnaire obtained data on what kind of educational experiences students had obtained, whether they stayed on at school, for example. Findings from the focus groups provided additional data on why participants decided to stay on at school, their views of the alternatives on offer and their experiences and views of school. The findings from the study could then be seen in the context of information drawn from the literature review, for example, the work of Roberts and Higgens (1992) and Heathfield and Wakeford (1990).

The questionnaire provided information on the what kind of occupations the sample had been involved in (the second shared area). The focus group interviews provided data on the respondents views of, and feelings about, employment and related these to their decision to apply to enter higher education. Findings were again related to student characteristics. Similarly, the questionnaire provided data on the sources of advice and information (the third 'shared area') students had received and the influences which had supported or failed to support their decision to enter higher education. During the focus group interview it was possible to

compare findings on advice and influences(the fourth shared content area) taken from the questionnaire and enhance these with views and feelings expressed by participants in the focus groups.

Figure 4.1 Group Interviews: schools and Access. Data analysis.



Chapter Five.

A 'model' of factors influencing application to higher education.

The content of the literature review, together with Bhaskar's (1979) perspective combined to suggest the production of some means of conceptualising factors surrounding entry to higher education and the implications for prior experience. This led to the production of the model outlined in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.2 p.7). This Chapter deals with the construction of the model and the way in which it was developed from the literature review and the theoretical framework. Subsequent chapters test and develop the model using the findings from the empirical elements of the study.

The fundamental property of the model is interaction between its components. Taking Bhaskar's (1979) perspective the model represents the efforts of students, as agency, to gain entry to higher education: to voluntarily compete for a limited number of places. Student effort is stimulated, facilitated or constrained by social interaction, in various contexts, and by structures. It is argued that entry is determined neither by individual effort nor social selection but out of the interaction between both of these mediated by social interaction. It is further argued that interaction between these three components is expressed in the education routes followed by students in gaining entry to higher education.

The model (Figure 1.2 p. 7) reflects Bhaskar's approach: it is concerned with the relations between the various components and how these affect entry to higher education. It is limited in that it represents a 'snapshot' in time of an essentially dynamic situation. The dynamic, in terms of Bhaskar's approach, arises out of the relations within and between the elements which perpetuate and transform the model. It is argued, however that the model clarifies and 'clears the ground' on the areas considered in the study, places student agency within the framework of structure and offers an opportunity to explore the relative significance of the influences involved.

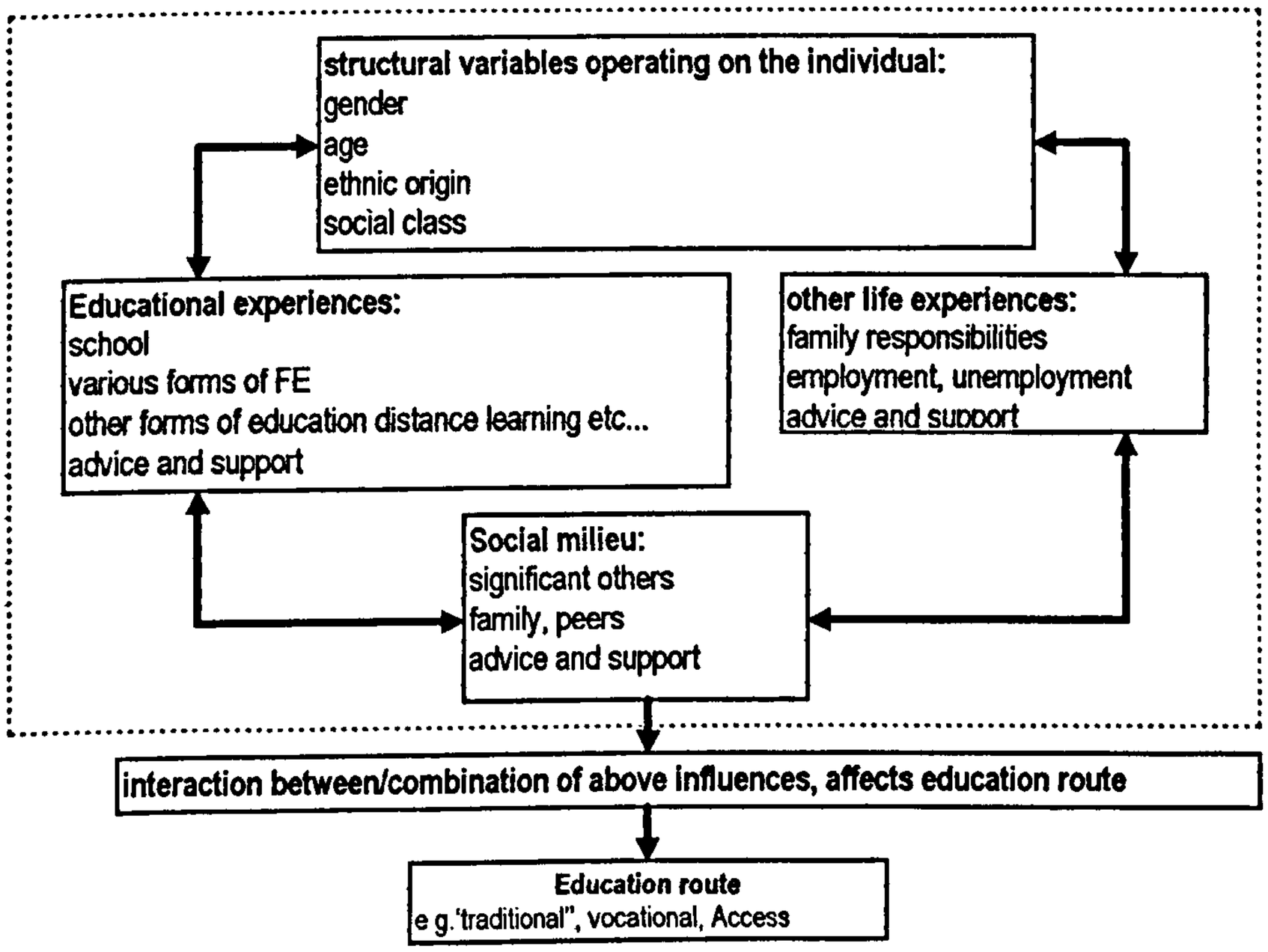
The model (Eigure 1.2 p7) is divided into two sections, right and left hand sides. The right hand side embraces social structures wider than individuals; national policies on higher education which interact with the higher education system as a whole, the individual institutions, their courses and admissions policies. Social interaction is represented on this side of the model in the form of interest and pressure groups including those attempting to influence government policies: those attempting to develop increased opportunities for particular groups such as 'adults'. These factors, represented on the right hand side of the model, are significant in affecting the probability that a particular student will gain entry to higher education. Decisions made at a national level in this area will affect the number of student places available in higher education, the amount and form of finance available to students and the resources available to institutions. At an

institutional level the interpretation of national policy will influence which courses are offered, entry requirements and admissions policies. The significance of the influence on entry to university of the elements included in the right hand half of the model is not underestimated but they are not the primary concern of the study. They represent the context against which the study is carried out.

The left hand side of the model, reproduced below (Figure 5.1) is concerned with the individual student, her/his characteristics and the social influences surrounding her/him expressed as experiences prior to entry to university. Four areas influencing entry to university were isolated from discussion and from the literature search:

- student characteristics, structural variables over which the student has little or no control. Typically these are age, gender and social class;
- educational experiences, including schools, various types of FE provisions, distance learning etc. and the expression of these in the form of routes through the education system;
- the social milieu in which the student operates. With reference to this study, mainly home and school; and
- other life experiences. In particular, unemployment and employment history and family responsibilities.

Figure 5.1 Factors influencing entry to university. (The left hand side of the model produced in Chapter 1 figure 1.2 p.7)



A further factor, advice and support, is included in each of the three experiential components of the model. This was included in the study for two reasons. First, as

a means of exploring the mediating effects of small scale interaction and student awareness or recognition of the influences of individuals, groups and/or institutions on entry. Second, to obtain information on the sources of advice and information available to students in the process surrounding entry to university.

The rest of this chapter takes each aspect of the left hand side of the model in turn, starting with structural characteristics.

Characteristics.

The literature search (Chapter 2) demonstrates increasing diversity in the characteristics of students entering higher education and the effects of characteristics. Age, gender and social class are shown to influence the likelihood of entry and to affect type of institution, mode of attendance and course and subject studied.

Educational experiences

The literature search recognised three routes into higher education ('traditional', 'vocational' and Access) which implied different educational experiences among students. The 'vocational' route, for example, might be pursued via various modes of attendance in further education which suggests a significant difference in educational experiences between those following this route and those entering university directly from school. Diversity in educational experiences is examined in terms of the education programmes, qualifications, categories of institutions and modes of attendance pursued by students. Variations in educational experiences interact with other facets of the students life; their perceived needs at a particular point in time, their knowledge of the alternatives available to them and the support they receive from significant others in their lives, for example. The approach adopted in the study is to explore educational experiences as routes through the education system and to relate these to the other life experiences of the students.

Social milieu.

Findings from the literature search implied interaction between educational experiences and social milieu. Heathfield and Wakeford (1990) (see Table 2.8 p.33 this study) indicate that social milieu influences attitudes towards school and the likelihood that students will stay on beyond statutory school leaving age. This is supported by Pascall and Cox (1993) (ref this study p.34) who draw attention to the differing attitudes of parents drawn from their own knowledge and educational experiences. The influence of peers and the local community is apparent in the findings of both Roberts and Higgens (1992) and Heathfield and Wakeford(1990) (see Table 2.8 p.33 this study). Experiences in the social milieu therefore interact with schooling and the likelihood that a student will stay on at statutory school leaving age and become a 'traditional' entry student, will follow a particular route

into higher education. The study explores the effects of social milieu in influencing alternative routes.

Other life experiences.

In terms of the model should the student leave the education system at statutory school leaving age, not take the 'traditional' route, other factors in the 'social milieu' and 'other life experiences' now become elements which influence student educational decision-making. Spouse and children, for example, now become significant (Pascal and Cox (1993) and "Learning the Hard Way" (1989). This study pp. 34-36) as positive or negative influences as do employment and finance. Adult responsibilities, the need to earn a living and to provide for children must be taken into account and will be reflected in choice of programme, institution and mode of attendance leading to the formation of routes through the education system as alternatives to the traditional route. Access courses, for example, were devised in recognition of the difficulties faced by adults and were designed to provide increased opportunities for them to obtain the qualifications required for university entry. There is also evidence of other alternatives embraced by adults in the literature search. Among the Pascal and Cox sample (1993 See p.37 this study) and in "Learning the Hard Way" (1989) students returned to evening classes or took Open University courses. Taking account of the existence also of the 'vocational' route and Wakeford's (1993) (this study Chapter 2) findings that adults were more likely to enter higher education using qualifications other than A-level there is evidence that 'adult' students make use of a number of alternatives in the education system in order to gain entry to higher education.

Advice, guidance and influences.

The importance of advice guidance and support from others also emerged from the literature search. The students in the Roberts and Higgens (1992) study had received the support of their parents, schools, peers and the Careers Service in their application to higher education, while students in the Heathfield and Wakeford (1990) study had not. (see this study Table 2.8 p.34) Contributors to "Learning the Hard Way"(1989) state a lack of support from others while in the Pascal and Cox (1993) study reference is made to the importance of support from spouses and parents. Knowledge of the availability of educational alternatives and the support of significant others are therefore influences upon entry to higher education.

Routes in to higher education.

Interaction between the four components of the model therefore influence the route followed by the student in making application to higher education and the two sections of the model, right and left halves, come together at this point. Applicants now pit their qualifications and experiences against others in

competition for a limited number of places. The student brings the 'baggage' of prior experiences, including educational qualifications, the support, or otherwise of the significant others in their lives, the advice and information they have received and the work they have done in selecting institutions and courses. In the light of resources and admissions criteria the institutions make their selections.

A final influential factor is what students expect to gain as a result of their efforts to enter higher education: their expectations of their higher education experience and the benefits they expect to accrue as a result. This is explored in the focus group interviews.

The chapters which follow (Chapters 6 - 14) present the empirical findings of the study as they relate to each component of the model. Chapter 6 therefore deals with student characteristics.

Chapter Six. Sample Characteristics

This chapter presents data on the characteristics of both the quantitative and qualitative samples. The breakdown of the questionnaire sample is shown below.

Table 6.1 Questionnaire sample. 3 courses

	B Ed Primary	B Ed Secondary	MODDS	total
All courses	143	114	110	367
Sample	92	89	70	251
per cent	64	78	63.6	71

Gender

The questionnaire sample as a whole proved to be predominantly female (Table 6.2) (information drawn from course lists), 178 females (71%) and 73 males (29%). There was some variation between courses: the Primary B Ed and MODDS samples were both predominantly female while the Secondary B Ed course included only slightly more females.

Table 6.2 Gender. Questionnaire sample: 3 courses

	female	male
Primary B Ed	74	18
Secondary B Ed	47	42
MODDS	57	13
total	178	73

Age range.

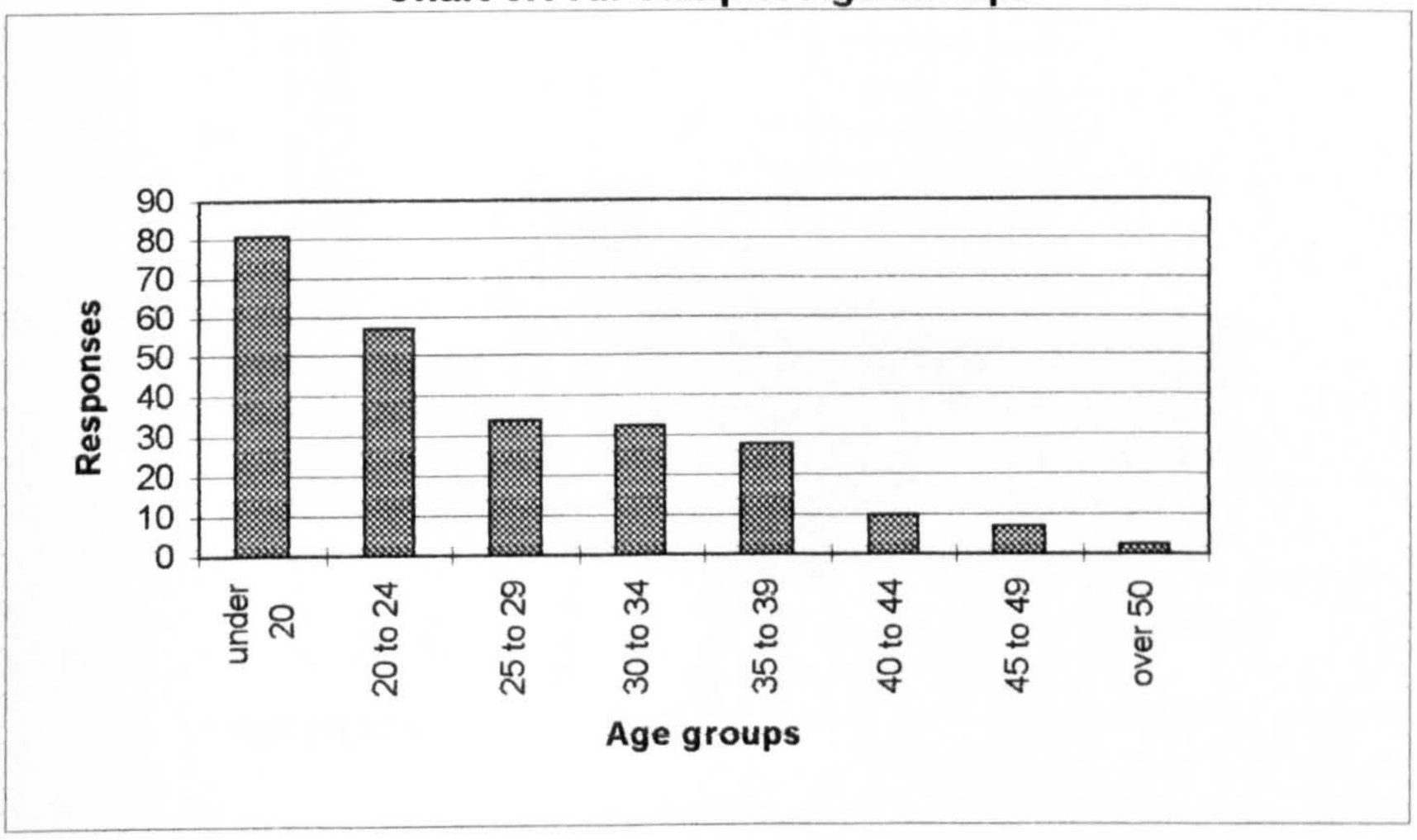
Given available resources, the aims of the study and the size of the sample, the use of birthdates was considered more complex than was deemed necessary. An alternative was selected which involved operating within predetermined age groupings, ranging from "under 20" years of age to "over 50" in 5 year stages. While recognising that these groupings constitute only "markers" in a continuous process, they provided a means of comparing the characteristics and experiences of the sample against an age scale.

Table 6.3 All sample. Age groups

age groups	PRIMARY B Ed	Secondary B Ed	MODDS	total	per cent
under 20	49	8	24	81	32.27
20 - 24	12	26	19	57	22.71
25 - 29	8	16	10	34	13.54
30 - 34	11	13	8	32	12.75
35 - 39	9	15	4	28	11.16
40 - 44	3	3	4	10	3.99
45 - 49	0	7	0	7	2.79
over 50	0	1	1	2	0.79
total	92	89	70	251	100

The findings for the age range of the whole sample (Table 6.3 and Chart 6.1) show that the 'traditional' group, aged under 20 on entry, constitutes a little over 30% of the sample. The university categorises any student over the age of 21 as an 'adult' which means that the '20 to 24' age group in the sample might, by this definition, include both 'young' and 'adult' students. The 'under 20' and '20 to 24' age groups combined constituted 54.8% of the sample and the remaining age groups 45.02%. Given that the university categorises any student over the age of 21 as 'mature' the sample is in accordance with the claim for the university as a whole(Chapter 4 p.58). Only 19 of the students in the sample were over the age of 40 and only 9 over the age of 45.

Chart 6.1 All Sample. Age Groups



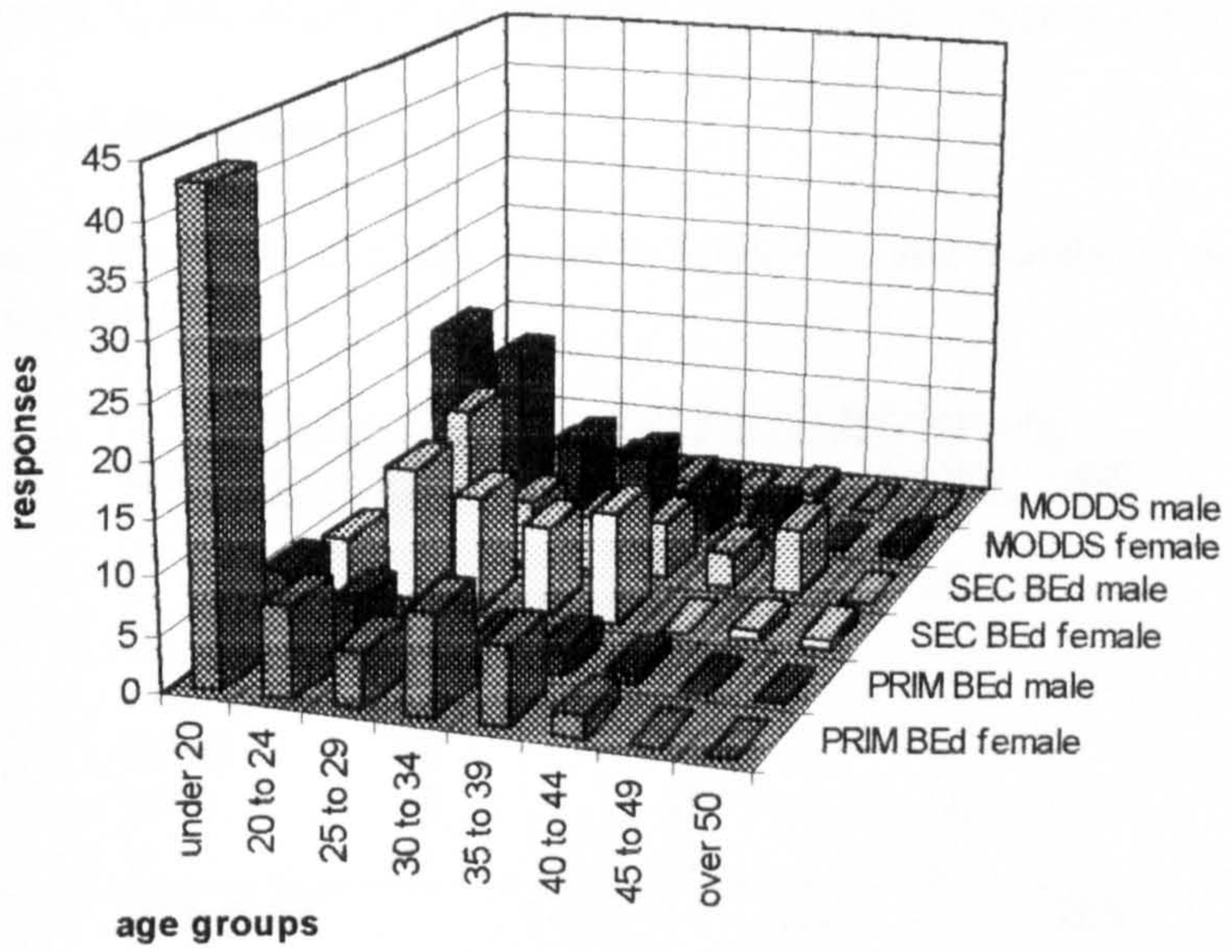
Variations in age groups were found between courses. 53% of the Primary B Ed sample fell into the 'under 20' category and a little over 62% of these students were under the age of 24 on entry to university. Of the MODDS sample a smaller percentage was under 20 on entry (34%) but the two youngest age groups combined constituted over 61%. The Secondary B Ed sample included only 8 students who were under 20 on entry and the two youngest age groups combined constitutes a little over 49% of the sample. The Primary B Ed sample had the narrowest spread across all other age categories and the Secondary sample the widest.

A comparison of age with gender (Chart 6.2 over leaf) showed that there were more women in the sample for all of the age groups up to the age of 40 and most significantly in the youngest age group. Comparison across courses showed that women 'under 20' on the Primary B Ed course constituted significantly the largest group, over the next largest, women 'under 20' in the MODDS sample.

The Chart (6.2) illustrates the general pattern of age and gender found across the three courses in the sample with the major clusters under the age of 40. The

number of young women wishing to enter primary teaching is particularly apparent as is the variation in the age and gender composition of the secondary as opposed to the other two courses. Also noticeable is the group of men in the '45 to 49' age group following the Secondary course.

Chart 6.2 Age/gender. 3 Courses.



Social Class

Occupational titles were requested in the questionnaire for two main reasons: first, in order to explore the type of work in which students had been involved and second to take account of social class issues. Studies of the student social class in the past have usually taken father's occupation as the basis for class allocation since 'traditional' students had no occupation. The increasing number of mature students anticipated in this study suggested that this would no longer be adequate. Given also the significance of women in the labour market, it was considered that the occupation of fathers only would no longer be sufficient. An occupational title for the student, their father and their mother, was therefore requested.

Students were asked to provide a "main" occupational title for themselves and for each of their parents. The intention in applying the term "main" was twofold; first, to encourage students to list occupations for themselves and their parents which they saw as appropriate and which reflected qualifications and experience, and second to avoid confusion which might have resulted from a request to provide "current" or "last" occupation.

Occupational titles, in effect, produced two pieces of data: the title itself, and the category of social class derivable from it. The data is therefore dealt with in two ways: a social class analysis is carried out here and then occupational titles are used to enhance and further develop discussion later in Chapter 9.

The questionnaire was designed to be read by an Optical Mark Reader (OMR) but it was not possible to deal with hand-written responses by this method. Responses were coded manually by the researcher. In order to obtain an overview of the social class background of students use was made of the Registrar General's Classification (Classification of Occupations 1980) (see Chapter 2 p.17).

Categories of Response.

Responses were found to give rise to some anomalies and variations on the intended scheme of classification.

Table 6.4 Occupational Titles: All Sample.

Category	students		Mother		Father	*total*
I	3		0		29	
II	39		48		68	
IIIM	25		18		78	
IIINM	62		53		16	
IV	13		28		12	
V	0		5		2	
Sub total		142		152		205
NC	12		11		14	
NR	97		31		22	
UE	0		0		3	
DEC	0		0		4	
RET	0		6		3	
HW	0		51		0	
Sub total		109		99		46
total	251	251	251	251	251	251

Student responses took one of four forms (Table 6.4): an occupational title which could be categorised in accordance with the "Classification of Occupations", an occupational title which could not be categorised in this manner, a non response and a number of additional categories for parental occupations. Non responses and responses which could not be categorised are recorded as NC and NR respectively in charts and tables. In recording parental occupational titles some students described their parents as "housewife", "unemployed", "deceased", or "retired". These are recorded as HW, UE, DEC and RET in charts and tables.

Non responses.

Over 90% of non-responses to the questions on occupational titles were recorded by students in the two youngest age groups. Given that the '20 to 24' age group will include students who were just 20 years old on entering university it can be concluded that the greater majority of non responses were recorded by those who had entered university as a continuation of their education, had not experienced full time employment and therefore had no occupational title to offer. Non-respondents in the age groups over the age of 25 provided responses to other elements in this section of the questionnaire which suggests that they had been in full-time work but were not willing or did not feel able to list an occupation. Only one student, a member of a group aged over 25, gave no response to any of the questions on occupational title, either for himself or his parents.

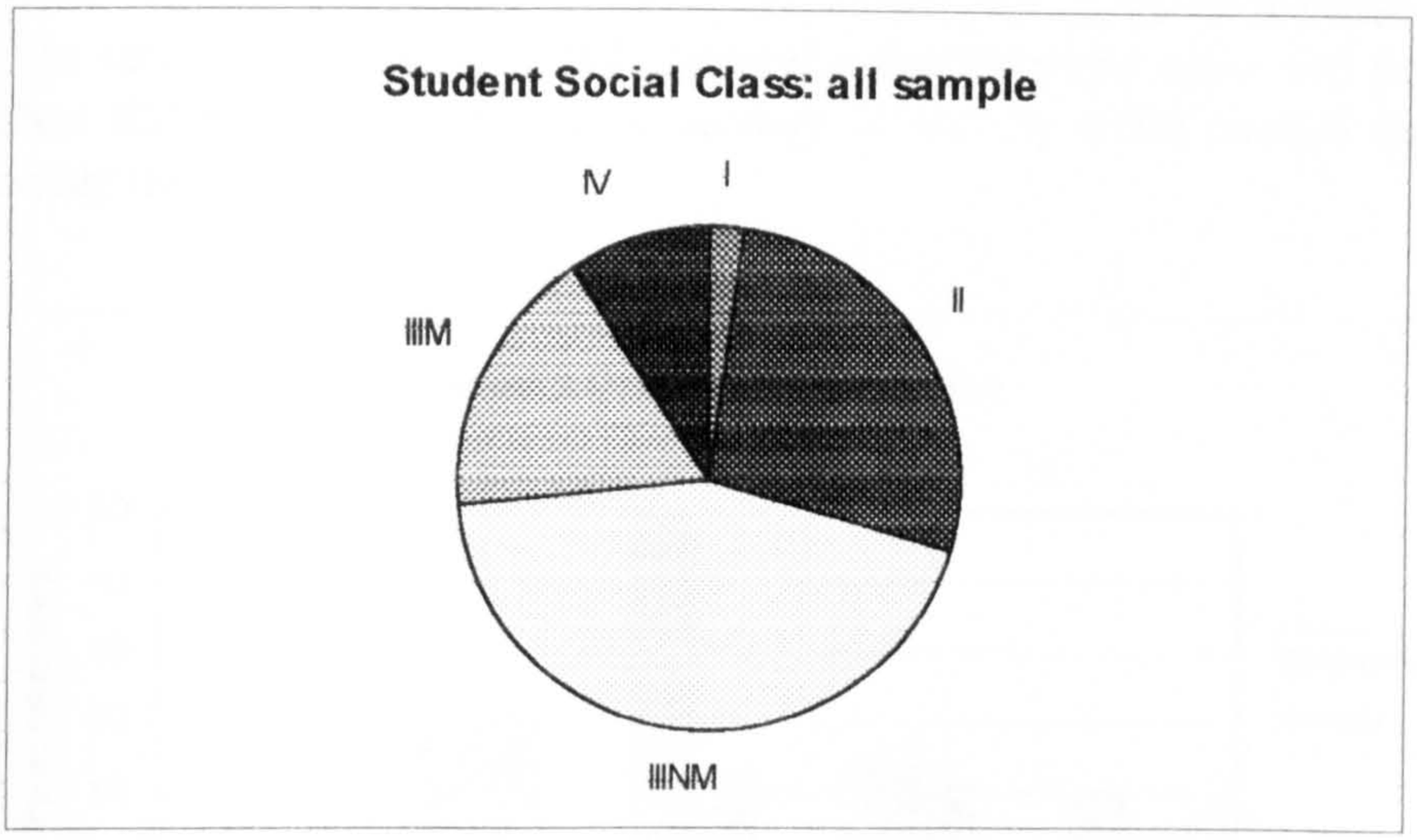
Responses which could not be categorised for Social Class.

Responses which could not be categorised (NC in charts and tables) took one of three forms. First, some of the titles offered by students are recognised by the "Classification of Occupations" but no social class categories are provided: members of the armed forces and students. Second, some of the titles recorded are not included in the classification: for example, "translator", "management services operator", "business man". Third, a number of responses stated an occupational area rather than a title and therefore could not be categorised: "purchasing and supply", "leisure management", "accountancy" and "works for as pharmaceutical company", for example. Finally 51 students (over 20% of the sample) listed the occupational title of their mother, as 'housewife' "The Classification of Occupations"(1980,p. X. note B.) lists housewives as "Economically inactive" and "Persons engaged entirely in unpaid domestic duties". No social class category is provided.

Social Class: Students.

In all 156 students recorded an occupational title (62.15% of the whole sample) of which 144 (Chart 6.3 over leaf) could be categorised for social class. Analysis indicated that the sample overall presented a group of people who had worked in mainly professional or skilled occupations. Occupational titles in social classes II and III accounted for 126 responses, 88.73% of the sample. Social class V was not represented while only 13 students recorded occupations in social class IV (mostly younger students who had taken work short term prior to entry to university). Social class I was represented by 3 students who were all engineers. All three had qualified and therefore stated engineer as their occupation but they had never been employed and had returned to university for teacher training.

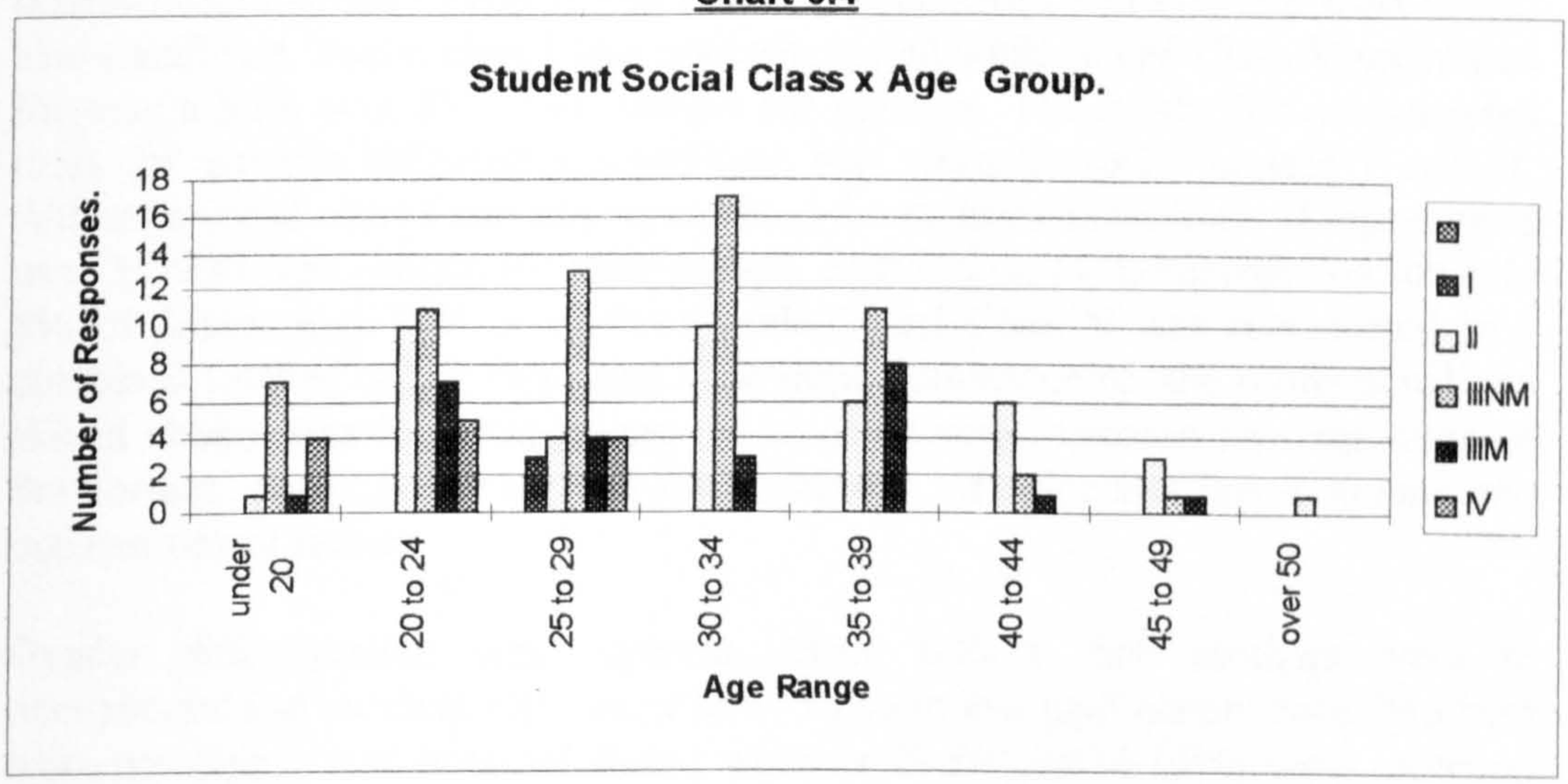
Chart 6.3



Age groups

Over 61% of the sample might be described as "mature" or "adult" students, most of whom had gained occupational experience. Analysis by age groups (Chart 6.2) shows differentiation at about the age of age 30. The three age groups under the age of thirty include a wider range of social classes; the '25 to 29' group includes all except social class V, while over the age of 30 social classes II and III dominate with an increasing trend towards Social Class II. The older the student the more likely they are to have been engaged in professional or skilled work, and increasingly towards professional work, prior to entry to university.

Chart 6.4

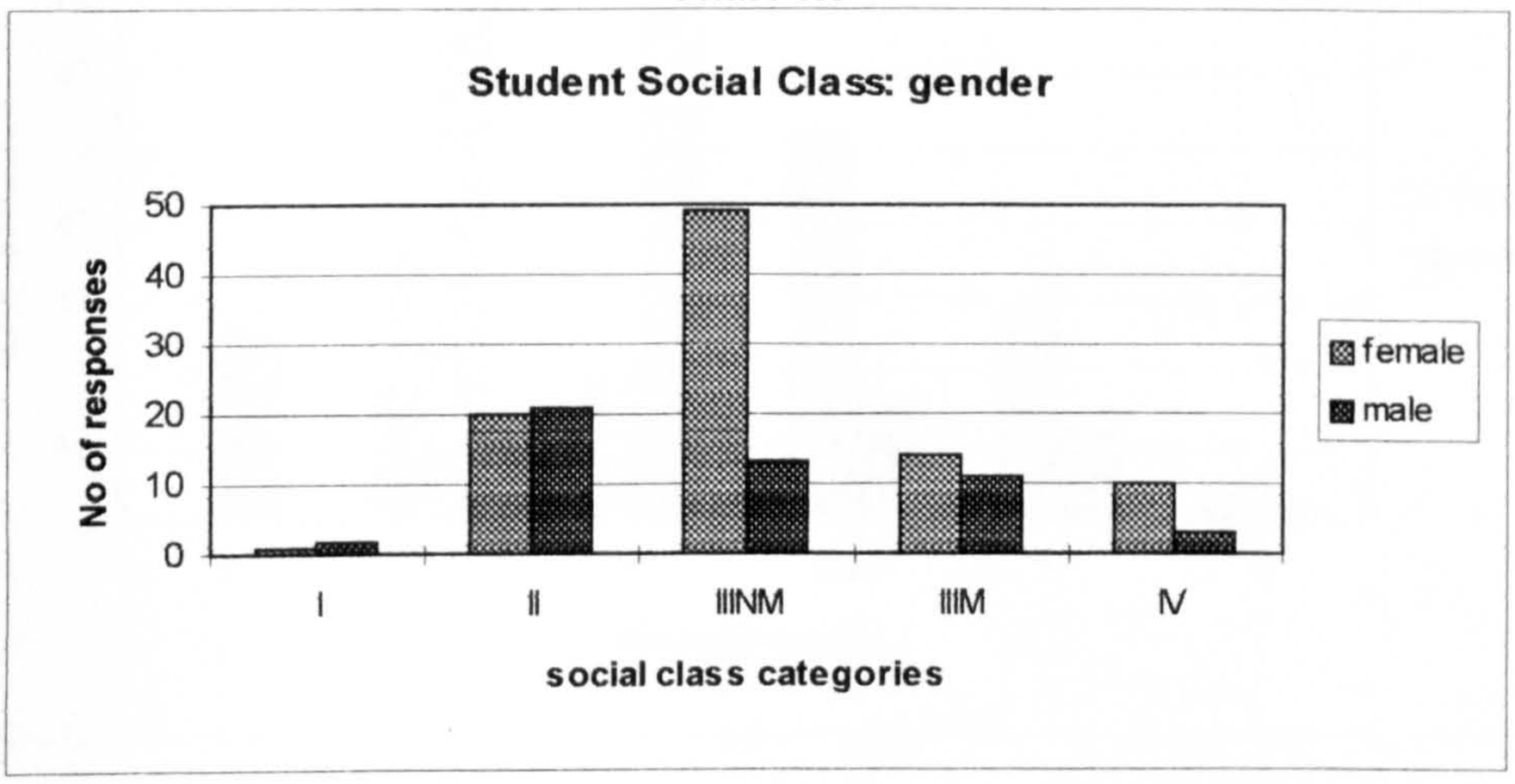


Gender.

The data for Social Class and gender (Chart 6.4) indicates broad parity between male and female in social classes I, II and IIIM but a greater representation of

women in social class IV and a significant difference between men and women in social class IIINM. This latter category accounted for 52% of women in the sample. In terms of percentage differences the gap between male and female in social class IIINM reduced but the percentage of men in social class II increased considerably over women.

Chart 6.5

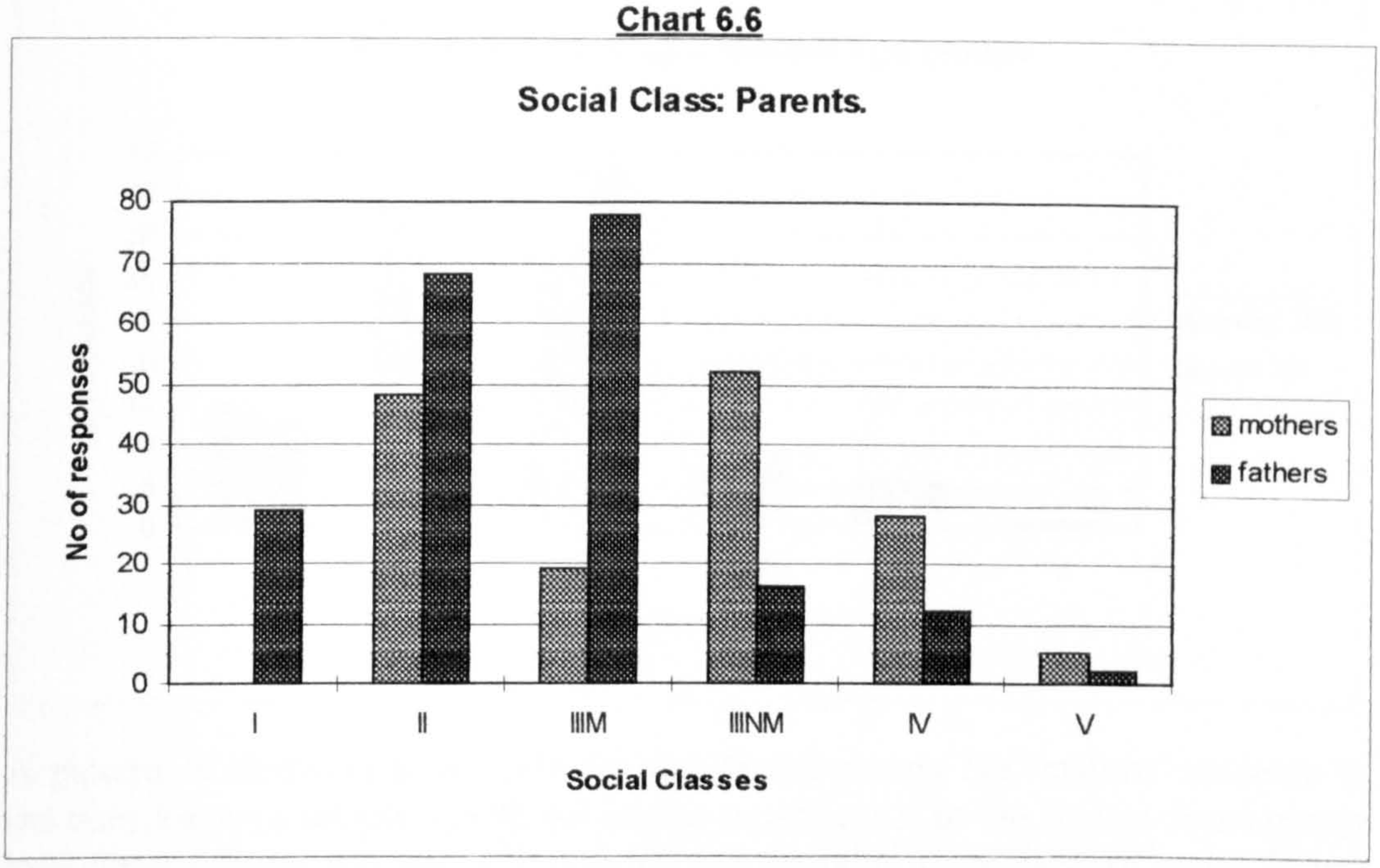


Social Class: Parents.

Occupational titles for fathers (Chart 6.6 over leaf) fell predominantly into social classes I, II and IIIM which took up over 80% of responses while over 47% fell into social classes I and II. Social classes IV and V were represented in only 7% of the sample. Results for the occupations of mothers in the sample showed the domination of social classes II and IIINM (66%) with IV (18%) and IIIM (13%) also significant. Social class I was not represented while Social Class V accounted for only a little over 3% of the sample for mothers. The results for occupational titles for parents indicated a significant bias towards social classes I and II. Although social class I was not represented for mothers social class II represented over 30% of occupations for both groups. Social class IV is represented for only 5% of fathers and 18% of mothers while Social Class V was represented in a combined total of only 7 responses. The same dominance of the professional and skilled classes was found as among the students with increased representation of the former, particularly the over-representation of Social Class I among the occupations of fathers.

Gender differentiation was apparent. More fathers than mothers were in occupations and mothers were more likely to be in low paid occupations. Mothers were not represented in social class I whereas 29 fathers(14.15%) were recorded in this category. Over twice as many mothers were in occupations classified as social class IV. Gender difference in type of occupation was also indicated by the almost mirror image of fathers in social class IIIM with mothers in social class IIINM.

Chart 6.6



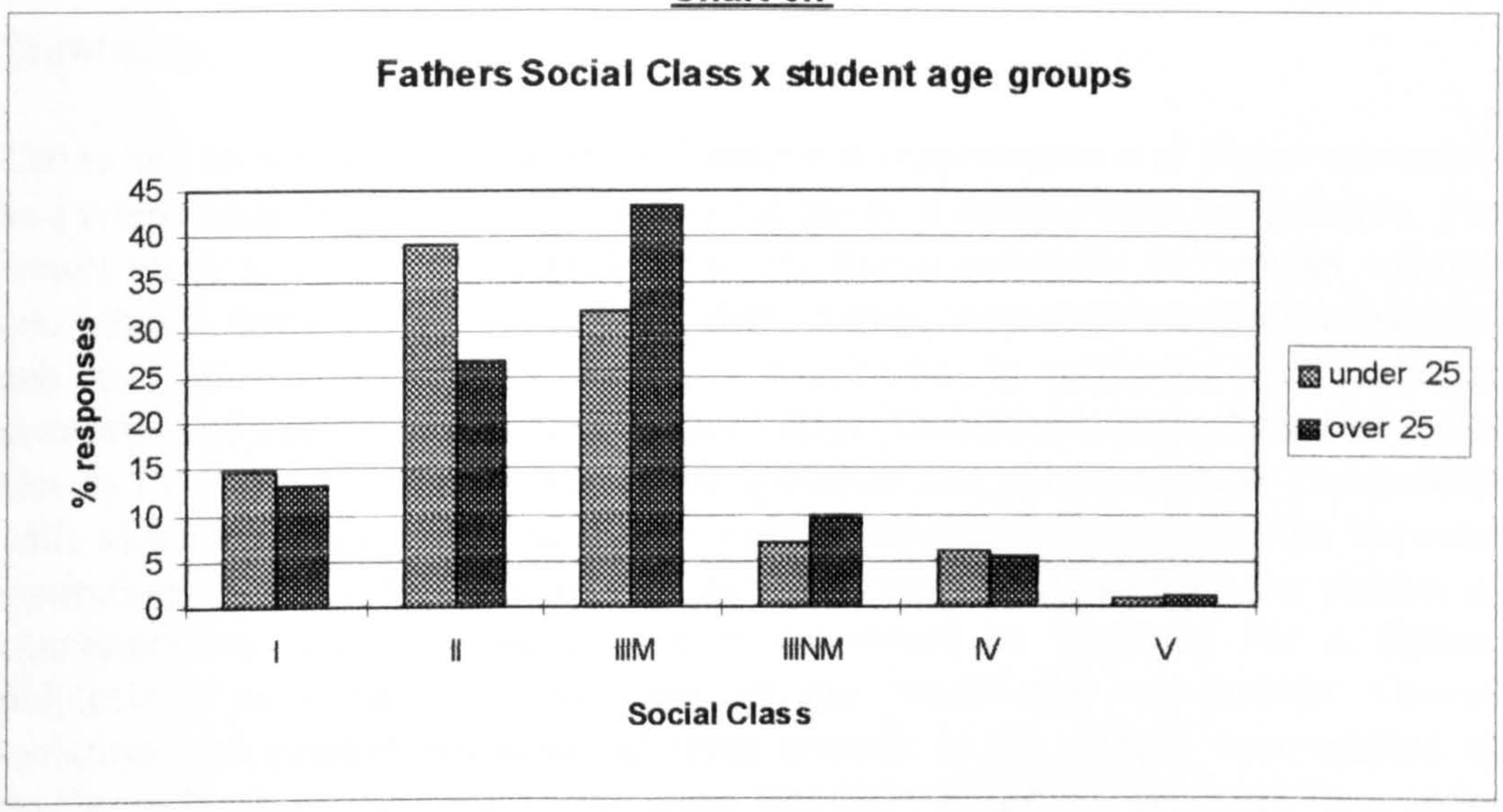
The possibility that the social class background of 'mature students' might be changing the social class profile of the students was explored by comparing father's occupations across the age groups. This presented problems since the size of the sample for the older age groups is very small. It was decided therefore to compare fathers' occupations for students under 25 with those over 25 (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Fathers' Social Class by Student Age Groups.

Social Class	under 25	over 25	total
I	17	12	29
II	45	24	69
IIIM	37	39	76
IIINM	8	9	17
IV	7	5	12
V	1	1	2
total	115	90	205

The data, indicates considerable similarity between the age groups supported by a correlation coefficient of 0.88. The chart (Chart 6.7 over leaf) indicates slightly more fathers in social classes I and II among the younger group but the pattern is very similar. This suggests that for this sample the "traditional" and "mature" student groups shared a very similar social class background.

Chart 6.7



A pattern of characteristics similar to that found among the 'mature' students in the questionnaire sample was found among contributors to the Access focus group interviews (Tables 6.6 and 6.7) The sample included more women and a larger number of students estimated to be in their 20's and 30's, particularly women in their 30's.

Table 6.6 Student characteristics: Access interviews. Gender

	female	male	total
Group 1	7	1	8
Group 2	5	3	8
Group 3	6	3	9
Group 4	3	5	8
total	21	12	33

(Excluded: 5 students who made no contribution Group 2)

Table 6.7 Student characteristics: Access interviews. Age groups (estimated)

Age groups	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	total
20's	4	1	6	4	15
30's	2	3	2	3	10
40's	2	4	1	1	8
total	8	8	9	8	33

With reference to social class the focus groups were not directly asked for information on social class background so that there was insufficient evidence to draw direct comparisons between the Access groups and the questionnaire sample. However, no occupations in social class I were found among the Access students, there was representation of social class II (for example a former nurse) and social classes IIINM (office work, shop assistants) and IIIM (engineering work) were well represented. Representation of social classes IV and V was uncertain.

Summary.

The extent to which the questionnaire sample is representative of higher education as a whole must be treated with caution but positive comparisons are possible. The results show a pattern comparable with that found nationally for teacher training courses (Modood 1993 p.175) in that there was an over-representation of women and an under-representation of ethnic minorities. In terms of age (a larger proportion of mature students) and, social class (the under-representation of social classes IV and V) the findings from the questionnaire sample are also comparable with national figures (Chapter 2). Variation in student characteristics between institutions found in the national statistics were also demonstrated: the pattern of characteristics found in the sample is as would be expected for a former polytechnic as compared with some of the 'traditional' universities. Course variation was present but since all three courses in the sample were related to teacher education the differences were less than might be expected in a more diverse range of courses.

Gender differentiation was apparant among the findings. Women in the sample (both female students and their mothers) were less likely than men to have been in full-time employment, less likely to have been in higher status occupations and more likely to have been in particular types of employment designated 'women's work'. The bias towards women in the sample seems to be related to teaching as an appropriate middle class woman's occupation.

With reference to the model (Figure 1.1 p.7) the major characteristic influencing entry to higher education among the study samples is social class. The findings indicate that in terms of social class the expansion of higher education has resulted in more of the same. Student social class background among the questionnaire sample (and suggested in the Access sample), taking account of both parental and student's own occupations, is heavily biased towards social classes I, II and III. There is evidence of diversification in terms of age but the bias, relevant to full-time attendance, is towards younger students under the age of 30. Subsequent evidence will show that this is related to the demands of adult life rather than age *per se*.

Chapter Seven. Routes into higher education.

The former chapter was mainly concerned with what the students in the sample 'were like' This chapter considers where the students 'came from' and 'how' they entered their course: their 'route' of entry. (see Chapter 1).

The term 'route' is taken to imply a process made up of the educational experiences through which students passed prior to entry to higher education. The personal experiences of the researcher gained while working in FE (Preface p.1) suggested that the three conventionally recognised routes into HE ('traditional', 'vocational' and 'Access') underestimated the diversity of educational experiences to be found among students. The suggestion that there might be more routes, or more variations on the recognised routes, was further supported in the literature search (Chapter 2).

Data on the last institution attended by students was considered inadequate for gathering data on routes. Such data provides information on the last stage of the process only. The alternative devised to explore routes in this study was to obtain, via the questionnaire, an 'educational biography' for each student in the sample from school leaving to entry to their current course.

Questionnaire items were formulated so as to reflect progress through the education system (see Questionnaire Section 3 Educational Experiences. Appendix 2): when students left school and where they went next, if they went into further education what courses they followed and where they went next. Data on attendance on Access courses and on other forms of post school educational experiences were requested. Information on type of institution attended, courses and mode of attendance, together with aspects of vocational training was collected. Data on qualifications, using categories from the university application form, were also gathered.

When placed on to a spreadsheet the questionnaire results could be read 'downward' to produce distributions of student responses, for example, how many members of the sample stayed on at school or how many had A-levels. An alternative analysis was possible by reading responses 'across' the spreadsheet for each individual student. Each respondent in the sample was allocated a 'personal identifier' (PRIM, SEC, MOD plus a number, 1-92, 1-89, 1-70) indicating course and respondent number respectively. Since the questions were organised in sequence it became possible to plot student responses across the spreadsheet and produce a 'trace' of the progress through the education system of each individual student, her/his educational biography. The third stage of data analysis collated the individual traces together into groups of students sharing similar patterns or routes through the education system.

Taking individual student traces first. The questionnaire results for each student were transposed from the spreadsheet into a 'flow chart' format.. These are presented on pages 105 - 124. The traces are organised by course (and by route which is dealt with later) and include data on age group and gender, and, where appropriate to facilitate explanation, qualifications and in some instances aspects of employment exprerience. Student number 6, on the Primary B Ed course, (p.105), for example, a woman, aged under 20 on entry, stayed on into the sixth form, studied A-levels, and entered her current course directly from school: the 'traditional' route. Looking across the individual traces however there is evidence of considerable diversity and of complex and convoluted routes. Student number 11, for example, on the MODDS course (p.115) a man in the 40 to 44 age group stayed on at school and then left to enter employment. He subsequently took part-time day and evening classes, OU and other distance learning courses before entering his current course full-time. Student number 74 following the Secondary B Ed course (p.113), a woman in her 20s stayed on at school and subsequently followed evening, OU and other distance learning courses before entering her current course. Neither of these students can be said to have entered higher education via one of the conventionally recognised three routes suggesting that additional routes were present among the sample.

Further analysis showed that though some of the sample had followed one of the recognised three routes there was considerable diversity of educational experiences among individuals allocated to these routes. Students who entered via Access courses (pp.108-110) were found in many cases to have been involved in other forms of educational provision prior to Access. Student number 36 following the Secondary B Ed course(p.109), for example, a woman in her 40s left school at statutory school leaving age and entered employment (elsewhere in her responses she described her job as an administrator; she was also married or living with a partner and had children). She had followed part-time day and evening courses before joining the Access course. Similarly, among those who entered via the 'vocational' route evidence was found of diversity of educational experience. Student number 21, following the Secondary B Ed course (p.117), for example, a man in the 45 to 49 age group, left school and went into employment and had then followed part-time day, evening, OU and other distance learning courses before entering his current course.

Production of the individual route traces suggested therefore that that the three conventionally recognised routes ('traditional', 'vocational' and 'Access') were present among the sample but that there were additional routes, and that division into the three routes 'masked' the diversity of student experiences within them.

A third approach to analysis sought for shared patterns among the individual route traces in order to allocate students to one of the existing known routes and also to search for more examples of routes of entry. As a result of this analysis eight

routes and one variation were found among the sample. These were designated a label (Table 7.1) which was allocated as appropriate to each student.

Table 7.1 Education Routes.

Route A	Students who entered university directly after leaving school.
Route B.	Students who left school, went to FE and then directly to university.
Route C.	Students who transferred into FE from the 6th form(with or without completing their course) and then directly to university.
Route D.	Students who entered university via an Access Course.
Route E.	Students who gained university entrance qualifications through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: evening, part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.
Route F.	Students who entered university via a vocational route i.e. those who gained vocational qualifications which are acceptable for university entrance as part of their training for a form of employment.
Route G.	Students who had been in the higher education system prior to their current course. For example those who had a degree or degree equivalent qualification or who may have commenced a course which they did not complete.
Route H.	Students who obtained the qualifications necessary for university entrance during their school career(or equivalent FE programme), left the education system and entered university at a later date. In the meantime they had no contact with the education system.
Group J.	Students in the under 20 age group who, in effect, followed Route A but were involved in other activities before starting their university programme.

Analysis of the data by age groups showed that the younger students had entered via one of three routes and that one group (Group J) had taken a 'year out' prior to entry. Route A (route traces p.105) students had entered via the 'traditional' route directly from school after taking A-levels. There was variation among members of a second group (Route B p.106) who left school to go into further education and studied combinations of GCSE, A-levels and BTEC. A third group of students (Group C p.107) had stayed on at school but left during the sixth form and moved into further education. The fourth group(Group J pp.123-124) of younger students had all taken a 'year out' following school or further education Evidence shows that most of these students had been involved in some kind of employment during this period. The data shows a diversity of educational experiences among this younger group of students such that it is misleading to subsume them under the single heading of 'traditional' entry by age. Categorising the students in this way also underestimates the contribution of further education to entry to higher education among this age group.

Students who entered their current course following an Access course were allocated to route D but the individual traces (p.108-110) show diversity in their prior educational experiences. Only 5 students entered university from an Access course who had not previously been involved in some form of education and/or training. The evidence suggests that Access is attracting those who lack the qualifications and educational experiences to enter higher education but that it is also used as a 'finisher' for those who already have educational experience and qualifications.

Route E (pp.111-115) constituted the most complex grouping. The students following this route were all 'mature', there were no students aged under 20 on entry who followed this route, and had obtained the qualifications for entry to university via a variety of educational alternatives. These students might appear in statistics as adults who had 'other' qualifications (see Chapter 2 p.25) or as 'adults' who entered via the 'traditional A-level route". The study findings demonstrate that both of these methods of categorising this group of students is inadequate. Their experiences differ considerably from those of the 'traditional' direct entry student such that this must be seen as another route rather than a variation on an existing route.

There is an overlap in qualifications between routes F (pp.116-118) and G (pp.119-121) and also some overlap in educational experiences. The primary difference is that the students in route G had entered higher education prior to their current course on a full-time basis. They were mostly, though not entirely younger students. Two (PRIM 67 p.119 and SEC 79 p.120) had been into higher education but gave no record of a degree, while others who followed Route G were retraining for teaching. Diversity of educational experiences among individuals within the routes is again apparent.

A small group of students (Route H. p.122) had gained the qualifications to enter university at school or in further education and, after leaving education, had used their qualifications at a later date to gain entry to university

As discussed thus far, the term route finds two applications in the study, there is a third which will be considered later (Chapter 11). The term route has a 'biographical' component as represented in the route 'traces' and also a 'statistical' component in that the distribution of routes across the sample can be shown and routes can be compared with other data from the questionnaire. Taking the 'statistical' component the distribution of routes across the questionnaire sample is shown in Table 7.2 and Chart 7.1 (over leaf)

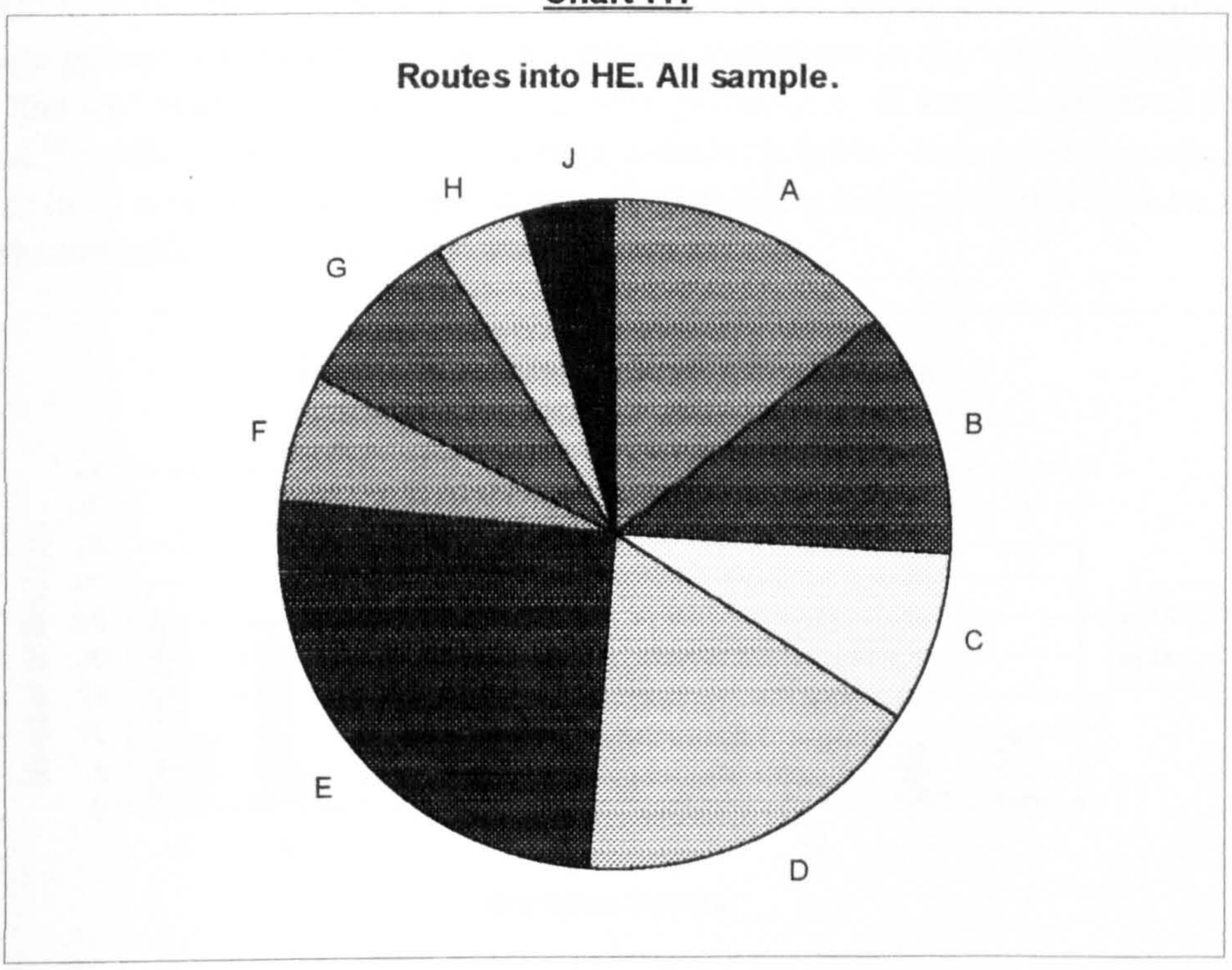
Table 7.2

Routes into higher education. All sample.

Route	Raw Data	%
A	35	14.29
B	29	11.84
C	20	8.16
D	41	16.73
E	63	25.72
F	15	6.12
G	20	8.16
H	11	4.49
J	11	4.49
total	245	100
exclude	6	
total	251	100

'Direct entry' (Routes A, B, C and Group J) accounted for 38% of the sample but the 'traditional route' from the 6th form only 14.49%. Alternatively, a quarter of the sample was comprised of 'mature students' (Route E) adults who had been involved in a range of different types of educational provision. Students who had followed Access courses comprised the next largest group.

Chart 7.1



Comparison of education routes with characteristics resulted in some clear and obvious results and some uncertainties.

Table 7.3 Education Routes: Age Groups.

Routes	Age groups							
	under 20	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	over 50
A	30	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	25	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
C	15	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
D	0	4	13	11	9	3	1	0
E	0	20	9	15	11	6	2	0
F	0	2	4	3	4	0	2	0
G	0	10	5	2	0	1	2	0
H	0	5	2	1	3	0	0	0
J	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In terms of age groups (Table 7.3) there is a clear division: all of the under 20 group and a small proportion of the 20 to 24 group, presumably the younger students, entered via routes A, B, C, and J. An age component among the other

groups is not apparent. This suggests either that the sample is too small to produce a statistically measurable result or that factors other than age, or interacting with age, influence route beyond school leaving. Evidence for the latter is offered in subsequent discussion.

Analysis by gender (Chart 7.2) shows a greater proportion of females following routes A, B, C, and J as would be expected given the larger number of females in the age groups represented. There are gender variations in the routes followed by the "mature" students however. The greater percentage of women followed routes D and E while fewer enter via F perhaps reflecting fewer vocational opportunities at this level available to women. Routes D and E are those which would be more readily available to 'housewives' and working wives.

Chart 7.2

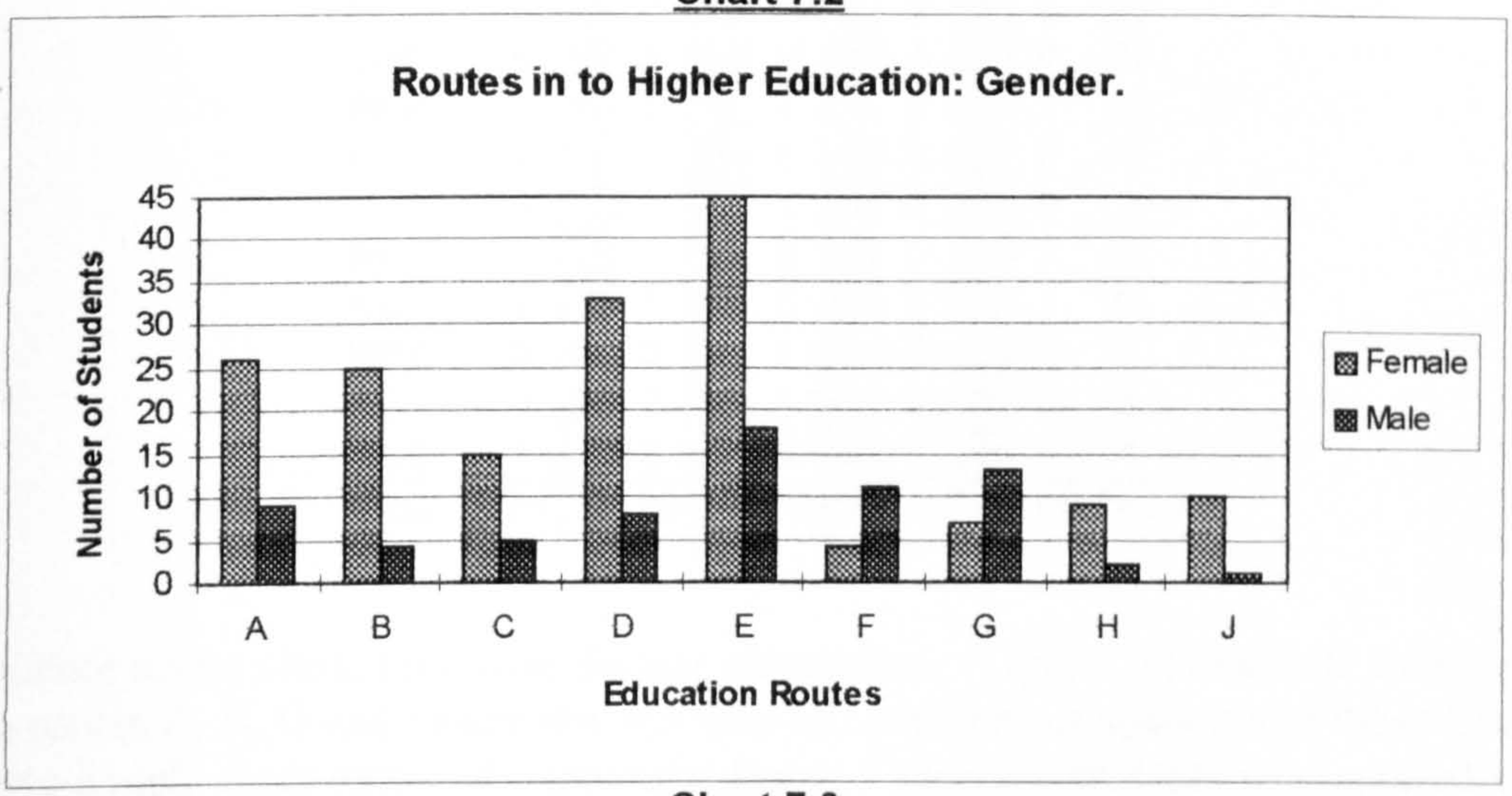
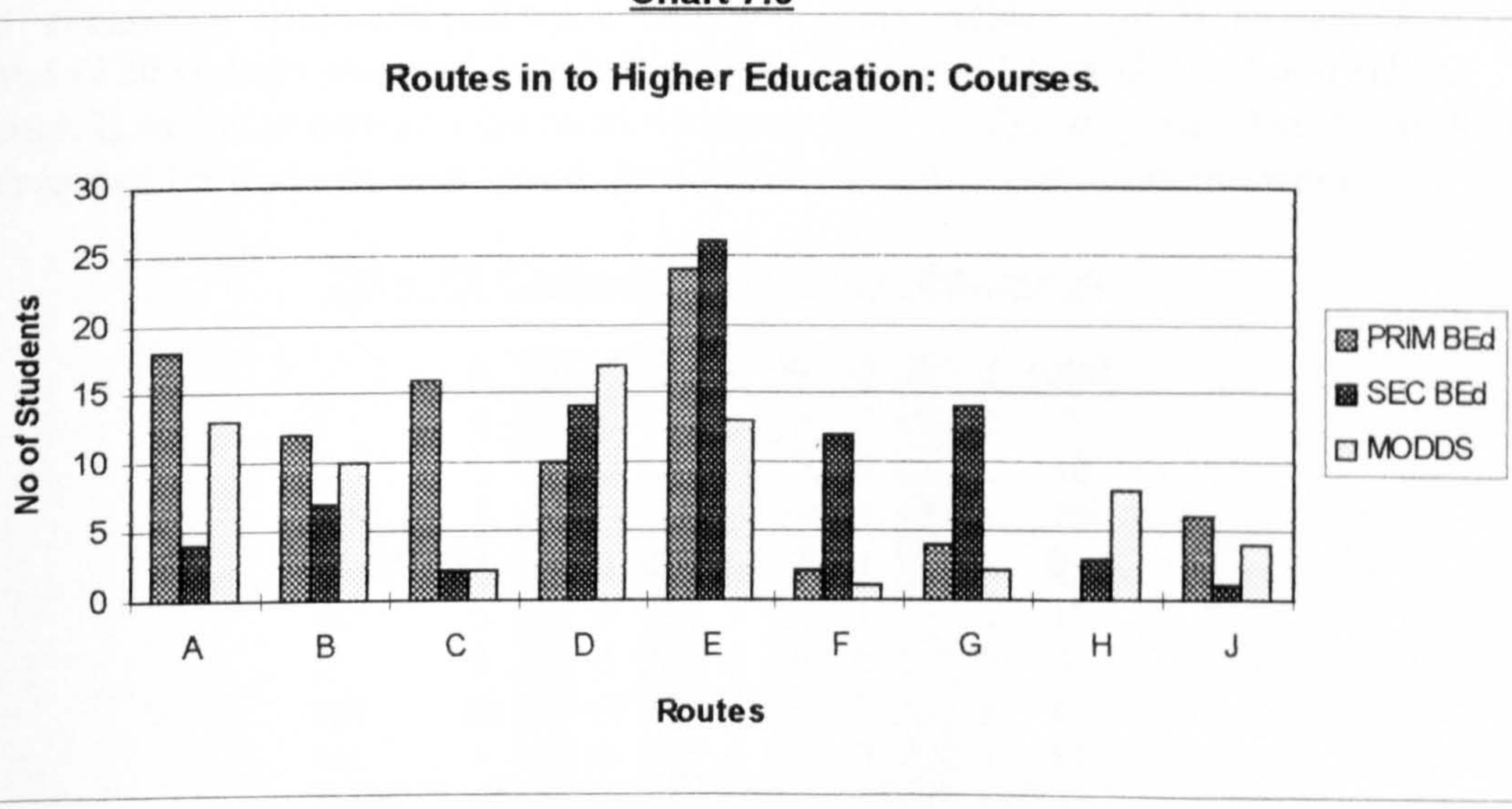


Chart 7.3



There is variation of entry route across all three of the university courses from which the sample was drawn (Chart 7.3) but the B Ed Secondary Course includes

fewer direct entry students and more students from routes E, F, and G. This reflects the difference in content and the student 'target group' towards which this course is directed (Chapter 4 p.59)

Analysis of routes by fathers occupations (Table 7.4) shows that students following all of the routes came from the range of social backgrounds found among the sample, taking into account that IV and V barely figure in the sample.

Table 7.4 Father Social Class: Education Routes.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	total
I	4	3	4	3	6	1	4	2	2	29
II	15	8	6	10	12	4	7	2	2	66
IIIM	9	7	5	15	21	6	4	6	4	77
IIINM	2	1	2	2	4	1	3	0	1	16
IV	1	3	1	3	1	1	0	1	0	11
V	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
NR	0	2	1	7	6	2	2	0	1	21
NC	3	2	1	1	6	0	0	0	1	14
RET	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
UE	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
DEC	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	4
total	35	29	20	41	63	15	20	11	11	245

Student social class, their own former occupation, (Table 7.5) has little influence on routes A, B, C and J since few students recorded an occupation and those listed were largely short term and temporary. Route F includes students who entered via the "vocational' route and had work mainly in social classes I and II. Routes D, E. F and G all include students with occupations in social classes II, IIIM and IIINM though E seems to be more favoured by social class II. This suggests that Route E is favoured by students with 'good' jobs and those with family commitments.

Table 7.5 Students social class: Education routes

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	total
I	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
II	0	0	0	5	19	7	6	1	0	38
IIIM	1	0	0	5	9	3	3	3	1	25
IIINM	1	3	1	21	25	1	4	3	2	61
IV	0	2	0	2	1	0	1	3	2	11
V	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
NR	32	23	18	5	4	1	6	1	5	95
NC	1	1	0	3	5	0	0	0	1	11
total	35	29	20	41	63	15	20	11	11	245

There is some evidence that routes are related to student characteristics but this is inconclusive. This may be a function of the small size of the sample but also

suggests that route is influenced by interaction between characteristics and prior experience rather than characteristics per se. This suggestion is explored further in subsequent discussion. Most obvious from consideration of route in the 'statistical' context is, first, the diversity found among the sample, and, second, the implied diversity of experiences. Chart 7.1(p.97) perhaps expresses this diversity more graphically than data on characteristics or educational qualifications. The evidence implies that the former division into 'traditional', 'vocational' and 'Access' routes under-estimates the diversity of routes into higher education and the prior experiences of students.

Some explanation for diversity in individual traces was sought by considering the outcomes of the educational experiences in terms of qualifications. (Table 7.6) Students were asked to indicate the qualifications they had on entry using the categories provided on the university application form. Findings for the whole sample (Table 7.6) show a dominance of A-level, GCSE and O-level. BTEC and Access are also significant as are, though to a lesser extent, OND, HND, ONC and HNC. Only one student listed no formal qualifications. Findings for gender follow the same pattern as for the whole sample and show no significant difference (Correlation 0.902).

Table 7.6 Educational qualifications. All sample: Gender.

*Qualifications	female	male	total
O-Level	76	43	119
A-Level	109	31	140
BTEC	27	15	42
Scottish Leaving Certificate	1	0	1
Overseas	1	3	4
Euro Bacc	1	0	1
No formal	1	0	1
OND	6	9	15
HND	8	11	19
Degree	2	1	3
GCSE	105	31	136
Access	31	7	38
Iris Leaving Certificate	1	0	1
ONC	5	8	13
HNC	5	8	13
Dip HE	3	2	5
O U credits	2	3	5
total sample	*178*	*73*	*251*

**Categories from the University application form.*

Variation in qualifications is shown in analysis by course(Table 7.7 over leaf). Though the pattern of the dominance of GCSE, O and A-level remains, students following the Secondary course are more likely to have 'vocationally' orientated qualifications such as OND, HND, ONC or HNC. This reflects earlier findings that these are more likely to be students following the vocational route.

Table 7.7 Educational qualifications. All sample: 3 courses.

*Qualifications	prim	sec	modds	total
O-Level	35	58	26	119
A-Level	66	42	32	140
BTEC	7	20	15	42
Scottish Leaving Certificate	0	1	0	1
Overseas Qualification	1	3	0	4
European Baccalaureate	0	0	1	1
No formal qualifications	0	0	1	1
OND	5	10	0	15
HND	2	16	1	19
Degree	0	2	1	3
GCSE	60	31	45	136
Access to Higher Education Certificate	9	15	14	38
SCOTVEC	0	0	0	0
Iris Leaving Certificate	0	1	0	1
International Baccalaureate	0	0	0	0
Scottish Higher	0	0	0	0
ONC	1	11	1	13
HNC	0	13	0	13
Dip HE	3	1	1	5
Open University Credits	0	3	2	5
total sample	*92*	*89*	*70*	*251*

An item was included in the questionnaire (Appendix 2 p.3 Question 20) to explore the time taken to obtain the qualifications required for entry to university by those stuents who left school at statutory school leaving age. The results (Appendix 8)) were inconclusive.

Students were also asked to provide "other qualifications not listed including 'vocational' as well as 'academic qualifications'". Responses (Table 7.8 p.104) showed that students had a wide range of additional qualifications. The list included vocational qualifications at different 'levels' together with qualifications in specialist areas such as music, the arts, languages and sports coaching awards. The data suggest that students took courses in education for reasons associated with their work and career development and also to pursue their leisure interests.

Evidence from the focus groups supports and adds to this data. The perceived need for qualifications, linked to improved career prospects, was included by the both the sixth formers and the Access students among their reasons for staying on at school and returning to education respectively:

Sixth formers:
"To try to get more qualifications."
"To broaden your horizons by getting better qualifications .... you broaden your career horizons."
Access students.
"To improve myself. Better career prospects."

> "Yes, I had practical experience but when it came to theory I didn't have anything, so this (the Access course) was a good option to choose."
> "I went for a job with a firm in London and was told, got told, I was lacking the qualifications for this career so I made the steps to get ...."

The diversity found in the route traces is not explicable only in terms of qualifications however. Qualifications were important to the Access course students but other reasons for returning to education were also offered:

> Access students:
> "Just a natural progression really. I sort of started about 3 years ago doing the same, trying to put something into your life that's not just home and the kids. And .... every year .... I sort of carried on doing something else. And it was like a natural progression 'cos you know, once you've got that stimulation your brain needs to carry on." (The student was later recommended to take an Access course by a college tutor as a more viable alternative to A-levels. She had ability at school but succumbed to the diversion of more attractive pursuits such as "boys" and "staying out late")
> "Well long term I'm hoping to get a better job but initially it was because I felt I was going stale staying at home doing nothing."
> "I should have done this at school and I didn't .... and it's for me." (trained, and worked, as a nurse but it was not what she wanted to do)

To qualifications as required for career development must therefore be added an element of 'personal development', of using education to change an unsatisfactory situation. It is possible, on the basis of data available up to this point to itemise and account for some of the variation found in the individual route traces. The variation found in these might have resulted from:

- obtaining the qualifications required for entry to university;
- obtaining qualifications or attending courses associated with employment: off-the-job training or re-training associated with a job, career development;
- the pursuit of leisure interests and qualifications associated with these;
- personal development and life changes.

The evidence demonstrates the relatively narrow range of qualifications accepted for entry to higher education. Though many of the students in the questionnaire sample possessed a range of qualifications, they also had items from the 'standard' list which appeared on the university application form. Among these A-level was dominant. This dominance is supported in data from the focus group interviews. The sixth formers wanted to study A-levels which they saw as the 'gold standard' for university entrance or for access to 'good' jobs. The Access students were also anxious to ensure that the validity of their qualification was justified, and, like the sixth formers, saw A-level as the standard for comparison.

> Access student:
> " .... it's not, it's not, people tend to think when I say Access, tend to think it's the easy road over A-level. I'd just like to give them a word of advice, I'd like to tell everybody that it's a high work load and I think it's as hard as A-level."

Thus, among the narrow range of qualifications accepted for entrance to higher education A-levels not only dominate of themselves, but are also perceived to be the 'benchmark' against which other qualifications are measured.

Summary.

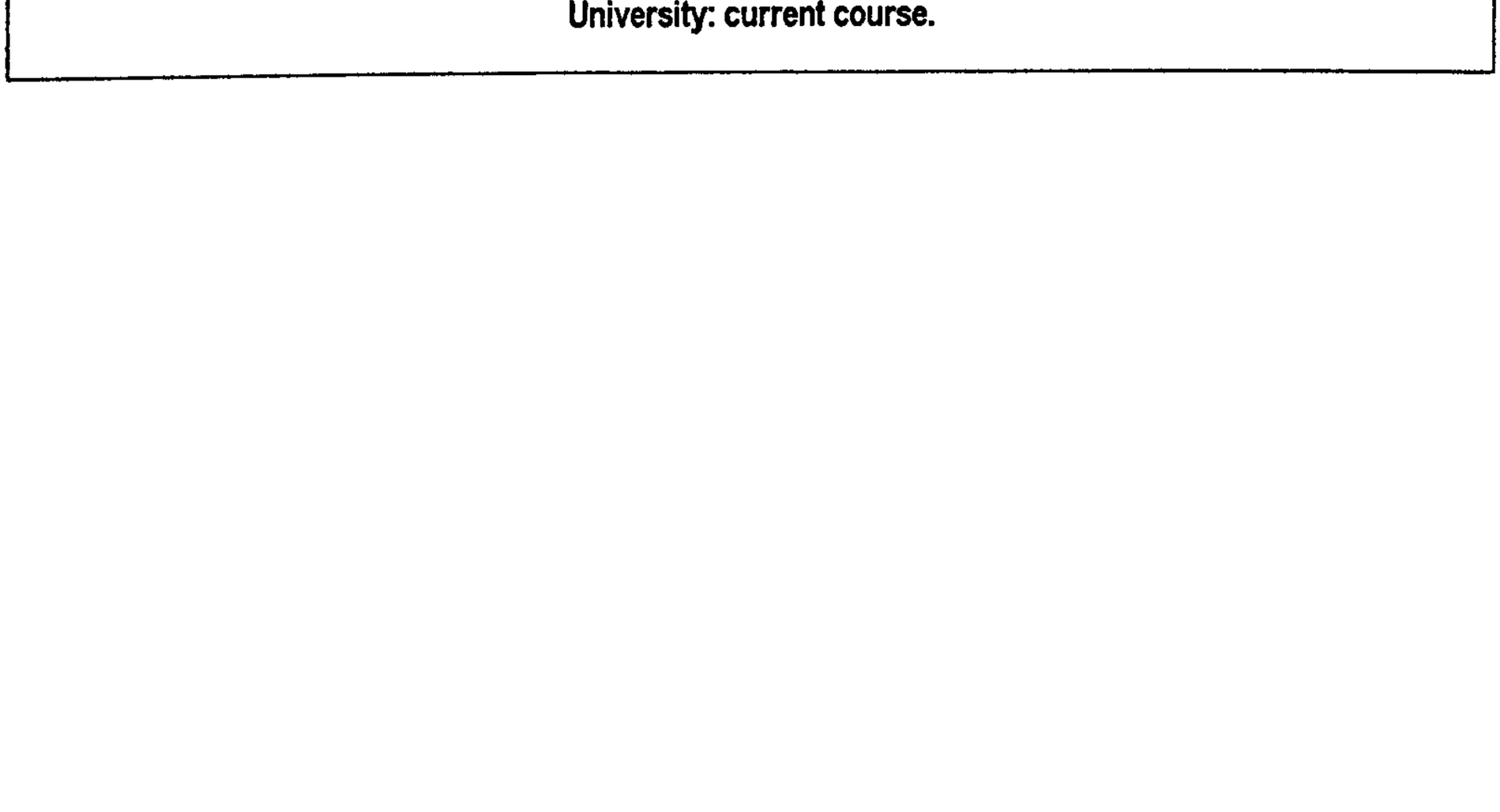
Taking all of the evidence on education routes presented so far, including qualifications, there emerges first, a picture of the questionnaire sample as a group of students, well-qualified and with a diversity of educational experiences. Second, the findings demonstrate the significance of further education as a 'feeder' into higher education. Of those aged over 20 in the sample, 55% took courses of some kind in further education. When added to those who followed routes B and C the results show that the majority of the questionnaire sample had some contact with further education during their educational careers and for many their further education experience was significant in affecting entry to higher education. The contribution of further education is highlighted in offering an alternative to the sixth form for young students, in providing Access courses and, perhaps more significant, in providing ongoing opportunities for entry, and re-entry to education at a number of 'levels', vocational and academic, via a diversity of courses and various modes of attendance across the age groups.

Third, the evidence presented so far suggests that the individual traces do not necessarily represent attempts to enter higher education. Routes A, B, C and Group J, may represent student aspirations for university entrance but many of the other traces represent student responses in educational terms to life changes and perceived needs including the development of former careers. At this stage there are indications of interaction between elements of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7), for example, between student characteristics and education, and employment experiences and education. The results at this stage are partial however. The interaction between other elements of the model is explored in subsequent chapters commencing with findings on school leaving.

Table 7.8 Additional educational qualifications listed by students.

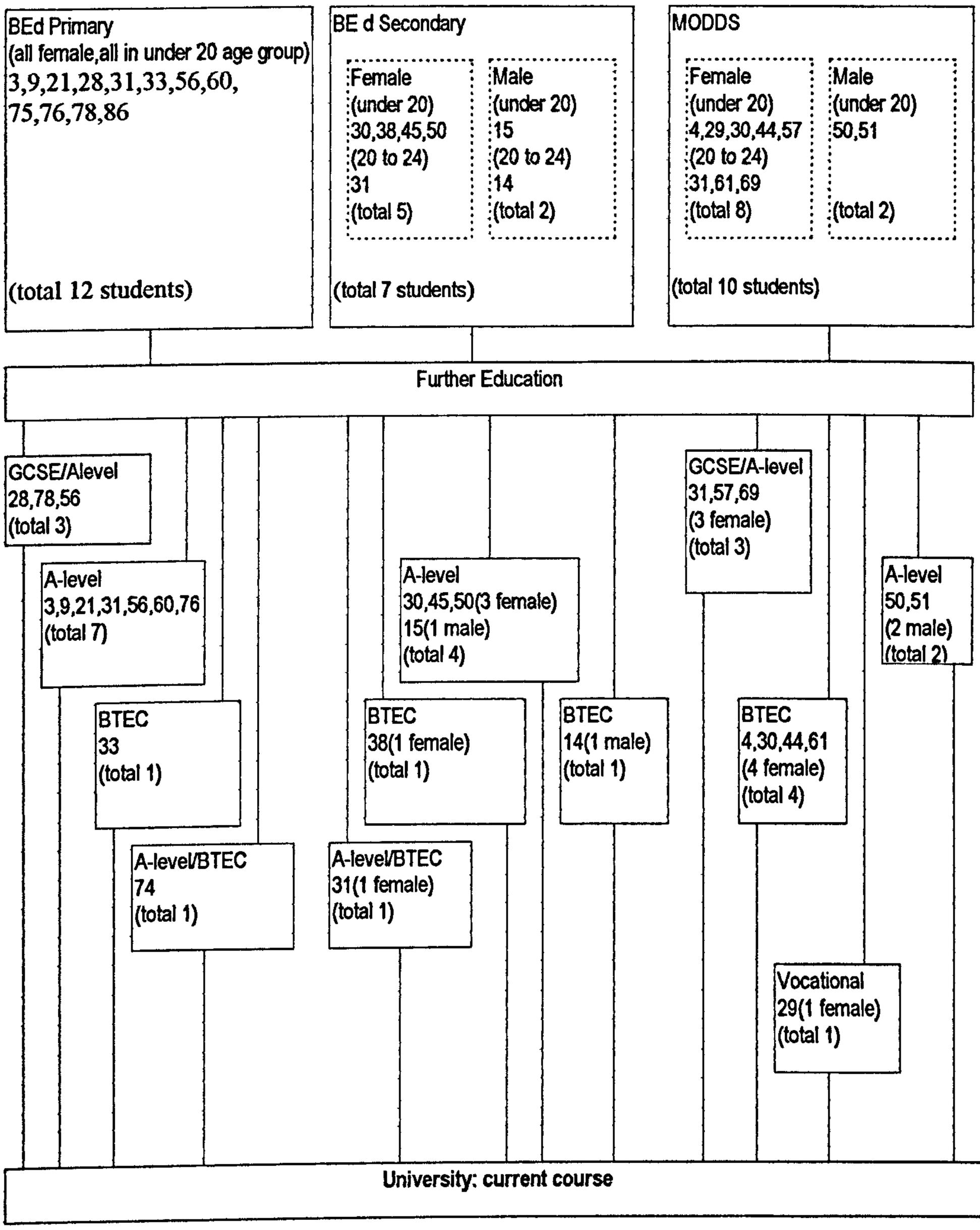
ACCA Exams Level 1
ACII Insurance Exams
Advanced typing
BAGA Gymnastic Coach
Banking Certificate
C+G Carpentry/Joinery
C+G Elec Install pt 2
C+G (unspecified)
C+G (unspecified)
C+G (unspecified)
C+G (unspecified)
C+G. A M I M I Prof Quals
C+G.Dress + Design
Carpentry Course Cert
Cert in Industrial Management
Cert of Journalism
Chartered Inst Bank Exams
CPVE
Dip Sales+Marketing
Dip. Institute of Purch + Supp
Dip.Careers Guidance. Part 1.
DMS Dip M.
EFL. Prep Cert
Equivalent to A level in Music
Foundation Course. Art/Des
Foundation Diploma
French Qualifications
HCITB Training Certs
Higher Dip(Institute Linguists)
IMS Cert
Inst Pub Health + Hygiene
Institute of Bankers. Stage 1
Instute of Personell Mget
Intermediate French
LCCI. Private Sec Cert
Music Exams
Music Exams.London College
music grades
Music Quals.Trinity College
NNEB
NNEB
NNEB
NNEB
NVQ(unspecified)
Proficiency of Cambridge
RN. Operating Dept Assistant
RSA 1
RSA and Pitman
RSA Dip. Traffic Management
RSA Dip. Bilingual Secretaries
RSA Typing III
RSA(unspecified)
RSA. Secretarial Quals
RSA. Shorthand
RSA. Word Processing
RSA.Bookkeeping: Info Tech
RSA.Shorthand 1 Typing 2
RSA.Teaching English as FL
RSA/LCC/Pitman exams
RSA/Pitman(unspecified)
RSA/WP.1and 2
RSAs
Scottish O Grades
Secretarial Dip
Swim teacher. Games+Ski Ins
Swimming qualifications
University Dip(unspecified)
Word Processing(unspecified)
Young Enterprise Qualification
C+G Info Tech

Route A


Students who stayed on into the 6th form and entered university directly from school
BEd Primary
(all in the under 20 age group)
18 students
Female
6,15,22,25,29,47,
49,57,65,72,90,92
(total 13)
Male
11,12,14,48,
66
(total 5)
BEd Secondary
4 students
Female
51(under 20)
6,88(20 to 24)
(total 3)
Male
85(20 to 24)
(total 1)
MODDS
(all under 20 age group)
13 students.
Female
17,18,21,22,
23,28,37,49,
52,68
(total 10)
Male
41,43,58,
(total 3)
Stayed on into the 6th form and studied A-levels.
University: current course.

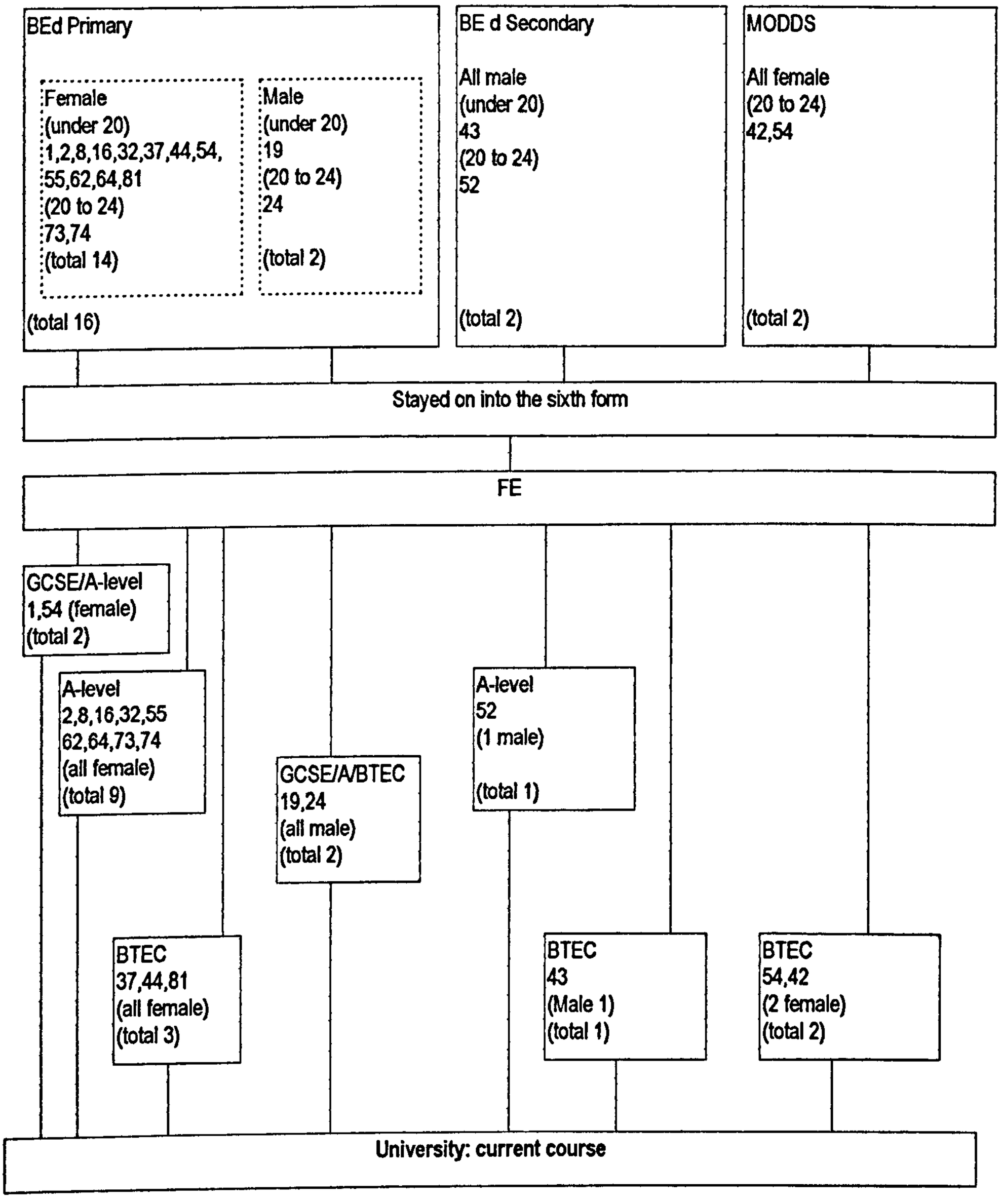
Route B

Students who left school at statutory school leaving age, went into further education and then entered university (current course) directly from college.



Route C

Students who stayed on at school and then went into further education, either with or without completing their sixth form studies.



Route D. Access: Primary BEd.

Age Groups								
under 20	20 to 24 70	25 to 29 20,83	30 to 34 63,68	35 to 39 82,85,84	40 to 44 51,89	45 to 49	over 50	total
(0)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(2)	(0)	(0)	(10)

Female
63,68,70,82,83,84,85,89 (total 8)

Male
20,51 (total 2)

Stayed on at school
63,89(total 2)

Left school
20,51,68,70,82,83,84,85 (total 8)

Work
63,89,84
(total 3)

Work/training
51,68
(total 2)

Training
85
(total 1)

FE
70,82,83
(total 3)

Other
20
(total 1)

Part-time day
84
(total 1)

Part-time day
85
(total 1)

Year out
70
(total 1)

(overseas qualification)
20

Evening classes
68,85
(total 2)

Work
70,82,83
(total 3)

Full-time course
63,89
(total 2)

Distance learning
85
(total 1)

Full-time course
82
(total 1)

No occupation offered
89
(total 1)

No occupation offered
51
(total 1)

No occupation offered
85
(total 1)

No occupation offered

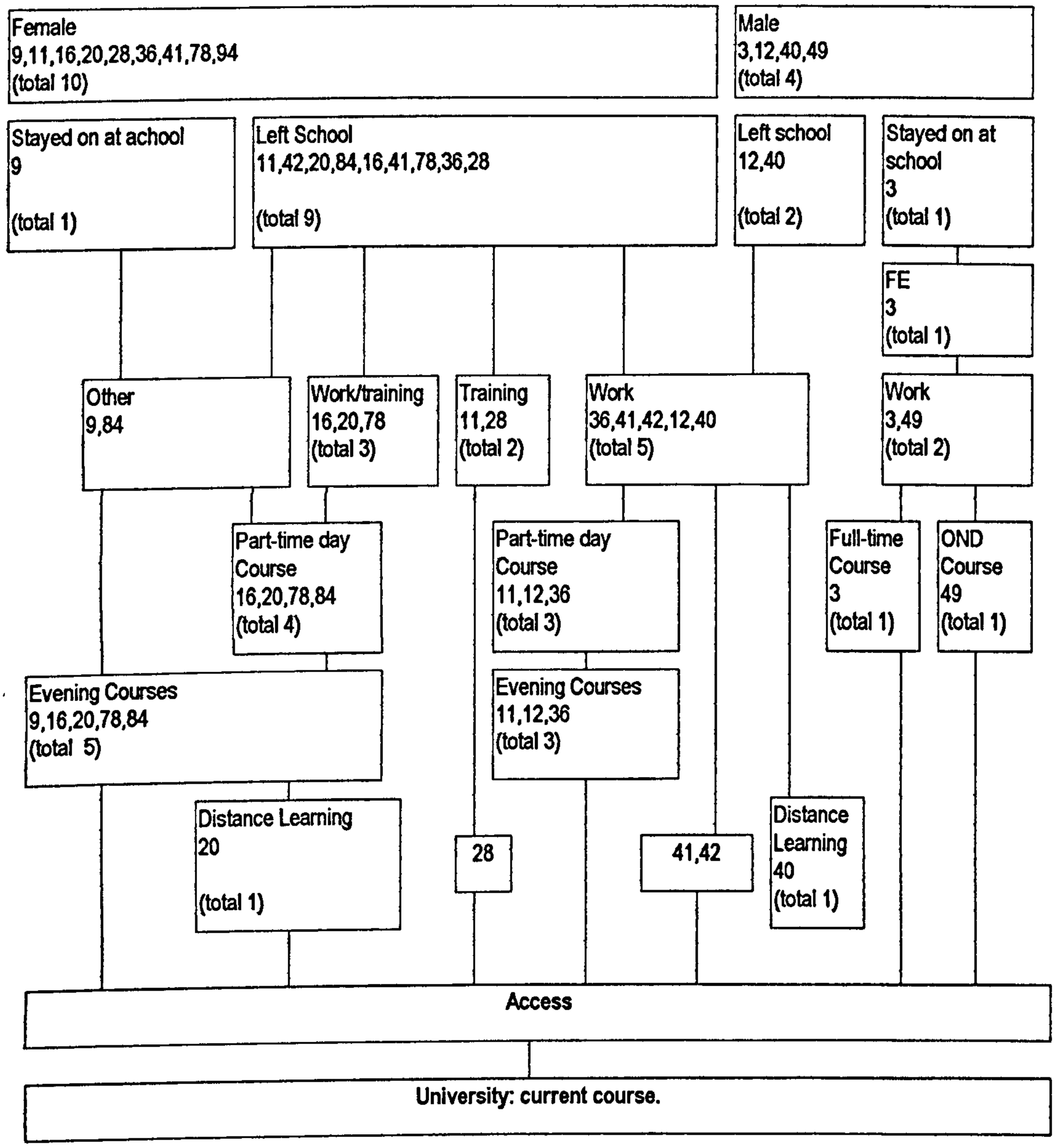
Access

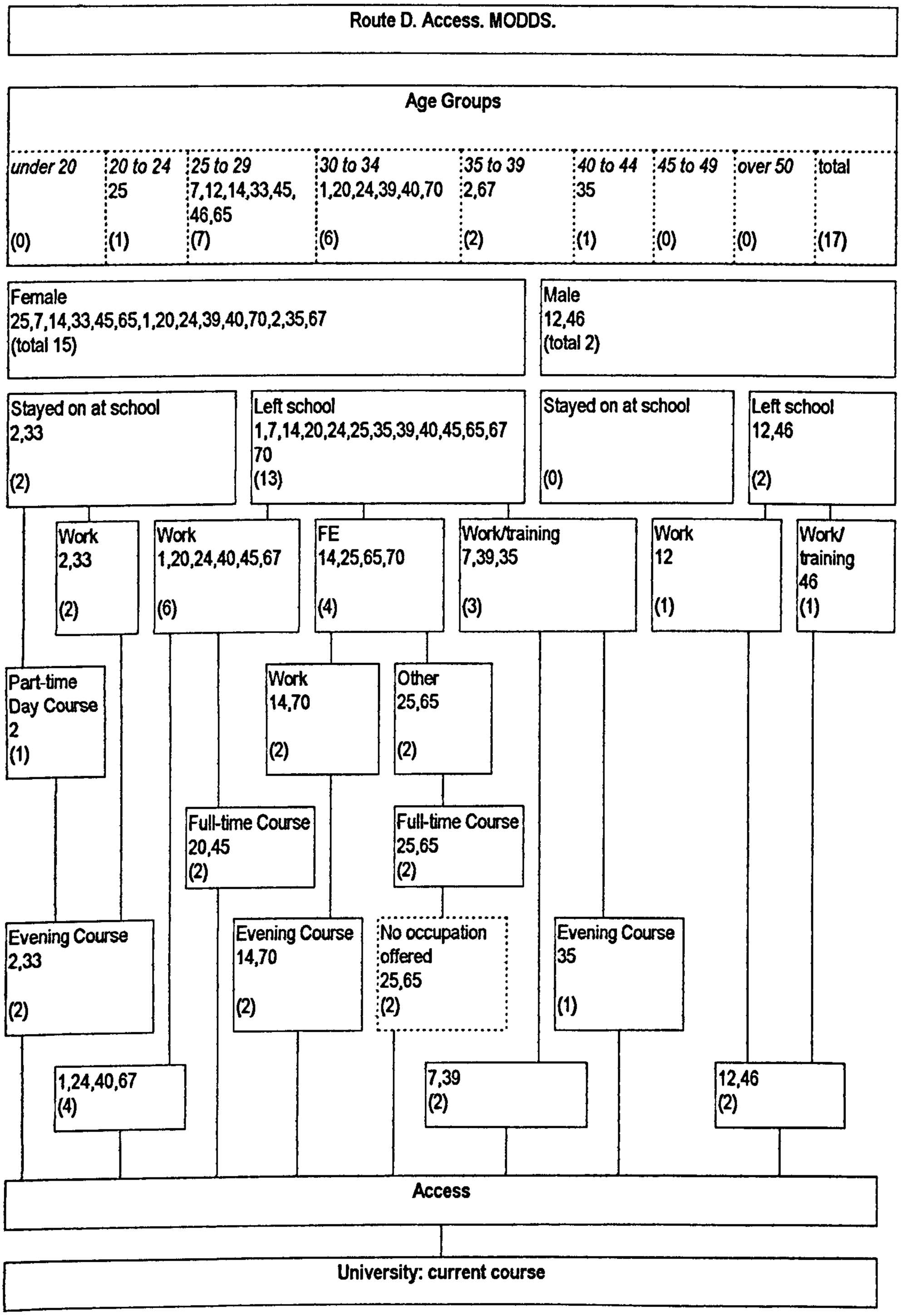
University: current course

Route D. Access. Secondary BEd

Age Groups

under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	*total*
0	3,49	9,11,28,42	20,8,12	16,41,78,40	0	36	0	
0	(2)	(4)	(3)	(4)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(14)



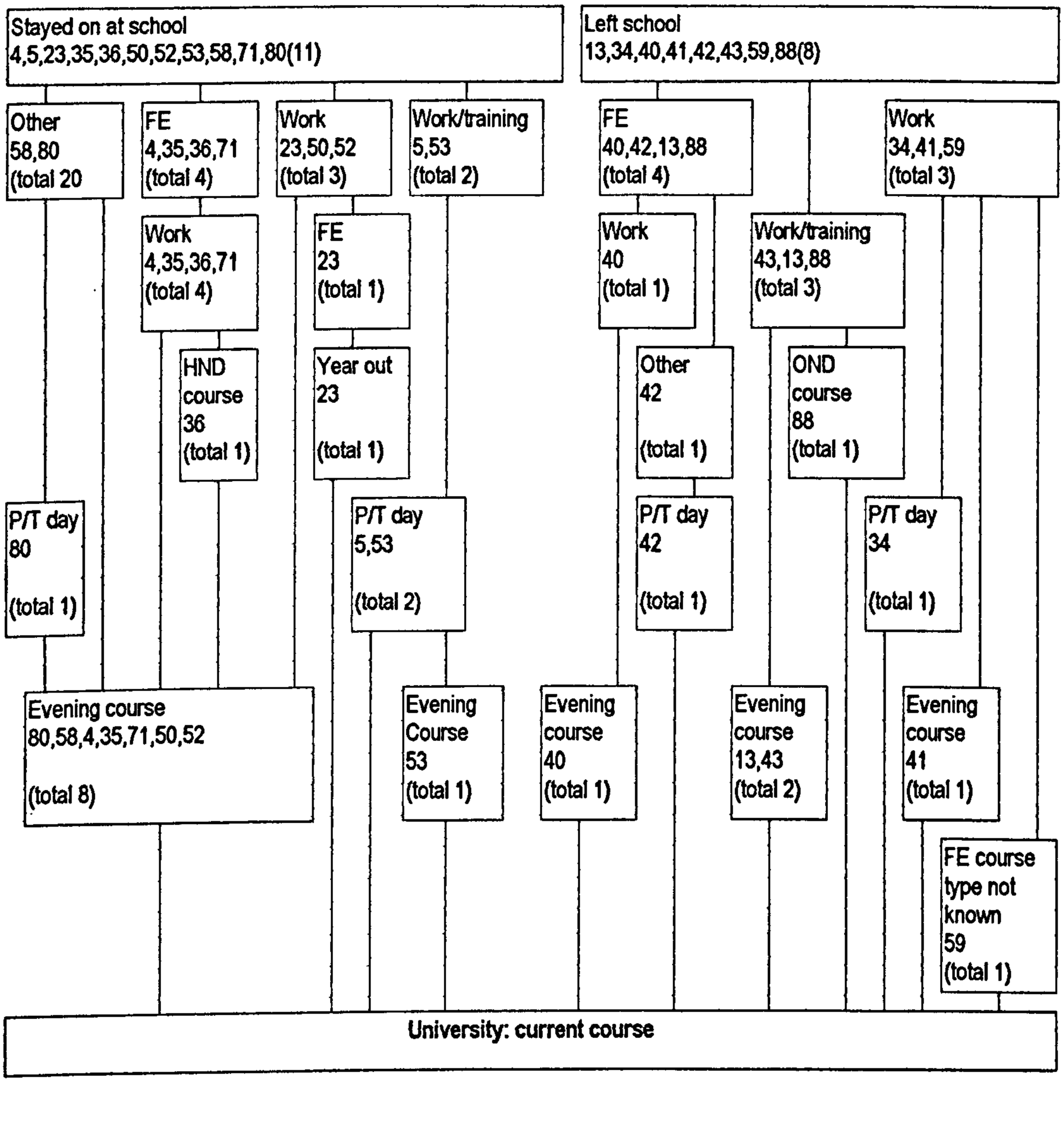

Route D. Access. MODDS.
Age Groups
under 20
(0)
20 to 24
25
(1)
25 to 29
7,12,14,33,45,
46,65
(7)
30 to 34
1,20,24,39,40,70
(6)
35 to 39
2,67
(2)
40 to 44
35
(1)
45 to 49
(0)
over 50
(0)
total
(17)
Female
25,7,14,33,45,65,1,20,24,39,40,70,2,35,67
(total 15)
Male
12,46
(total 2)
Stayed on at school
2,33
(2)
Left school
1,7,14,20,24,25,35,39,40,45,65,67
70
(13)
Stayed on at school
(0)
Left school
12,46
(2)
Work
2,33
(2)
Work
1,20,24,40,45,67
(6)
FE
14,25,65,70
(4)
Work/training
7,39,35
(3)
Work
12
(1)
Work/
training
46
(1)
Part-time
Day Course
2
(1)
Work
14,70
(2)
Other
25,65
(2)
Full-time Course
20,45
(2)
Full-time Course
25,65
(2)
Evening Course
2,33
(2)
Evening Course
14,70
(2)
No occupation
offered
25,65
(2)
Evening Course
35
(1)
1,24,40,67
(4)
7,39
(2)
12,46
(2)
Access
University: current course

Route E

Students who gained university entrance qualifications through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: evening courses, part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.

Bed Primary: Female

Age Groups								
under 20	20 to 24 23,43,58,59	25 to 29 4,36,41,88	30 to 34 5,13,34,42,50 71	35 to 39 40,52,53,80	40 to 44 35	45 to 49 0	over 50 0	total
(0)	(4)	(4)	(6)	(4)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(19)



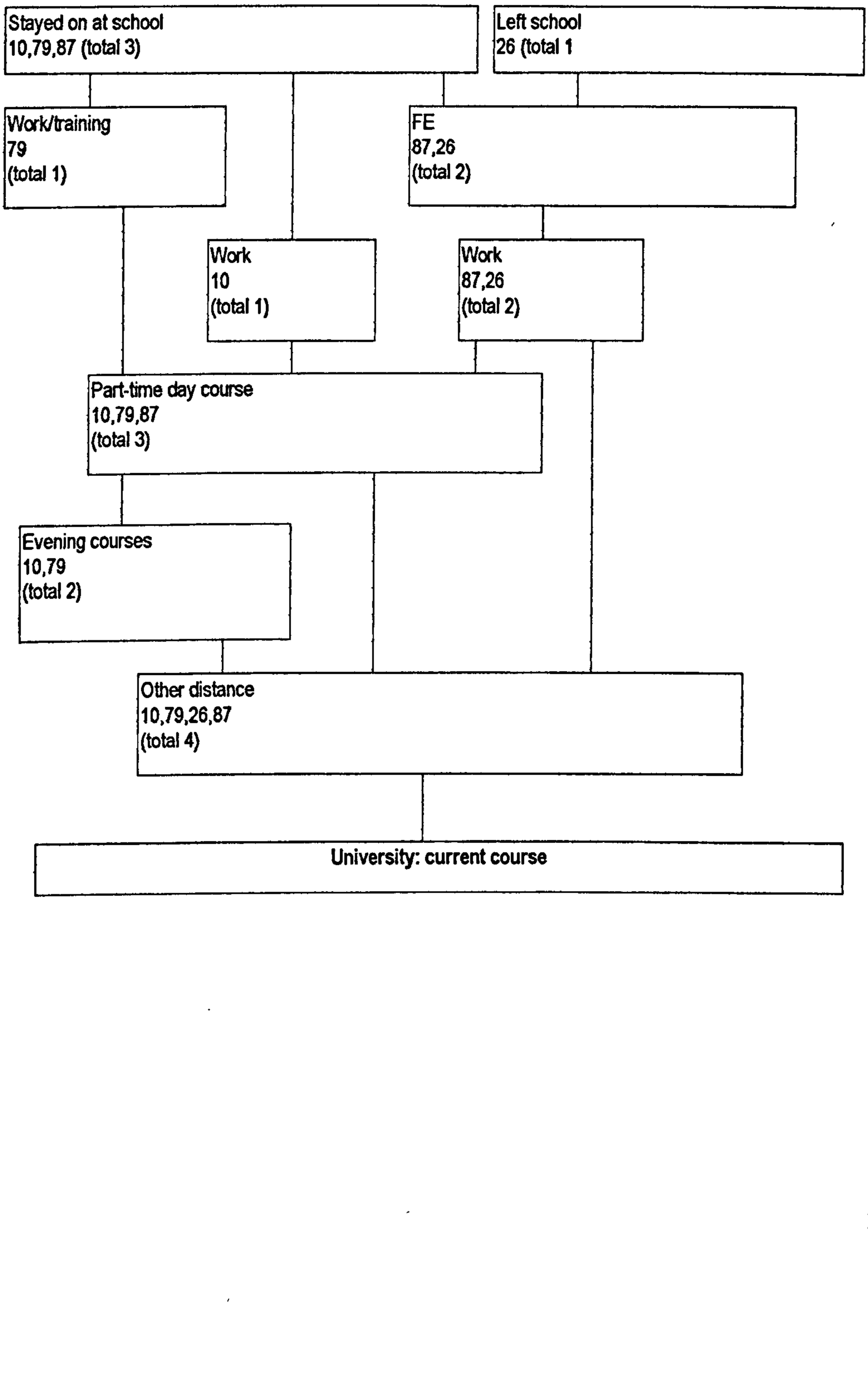
ROUTE3.DOC

Route E

Students who gained university entrance through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.

BEd Primary Male

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	26	0	10,18	79	0	0	0	
(0)	(1)	(0)	(2)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	4

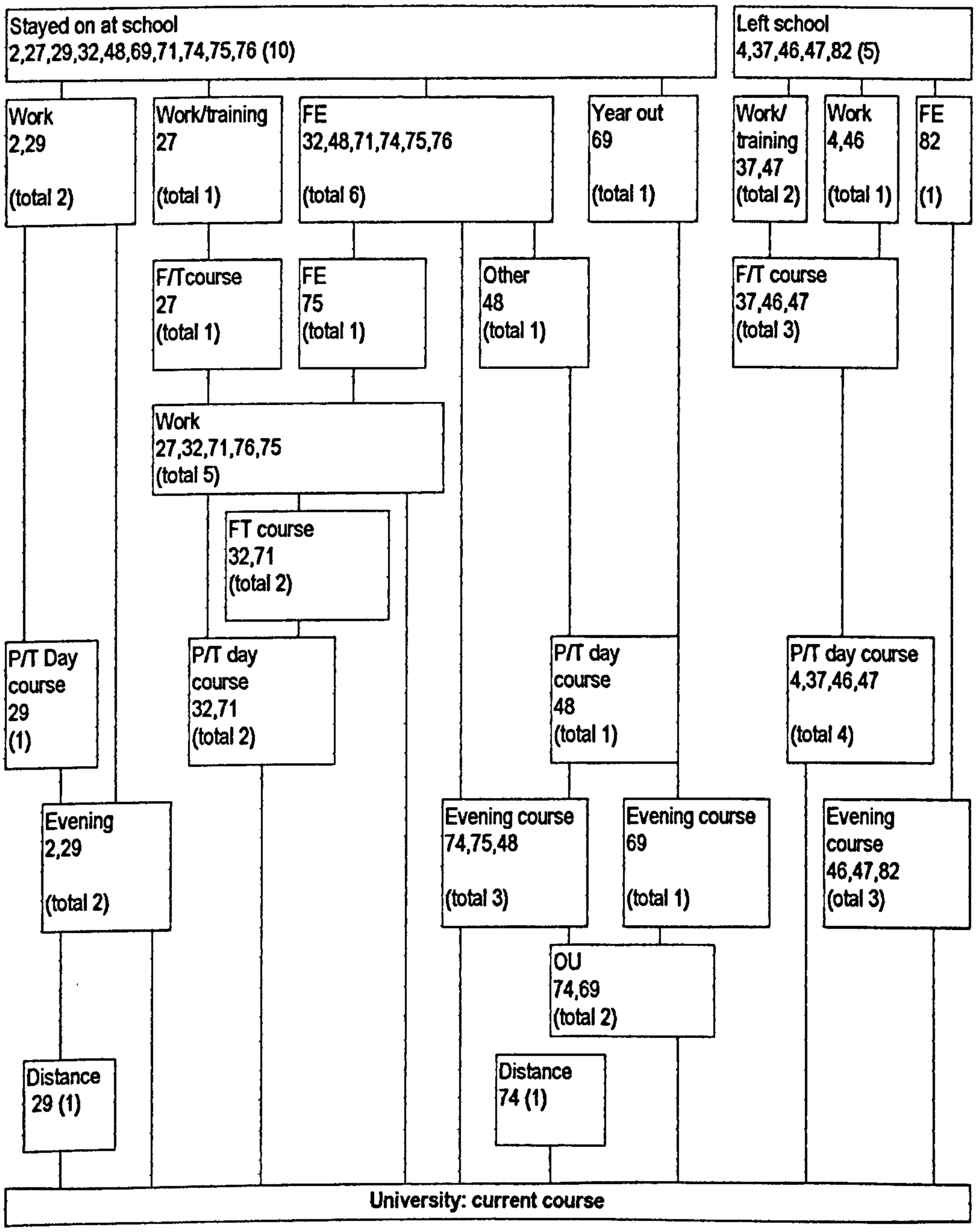


Route E

Students who gained university entrance through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.

BEd Secondary. Female

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	2,4,29	32,74,82	27,46,71,75 76	37,47,48,69	0	0	0	
(0)	(3)	(3)	(5)	(4)	(0)	(0)	(0)	15

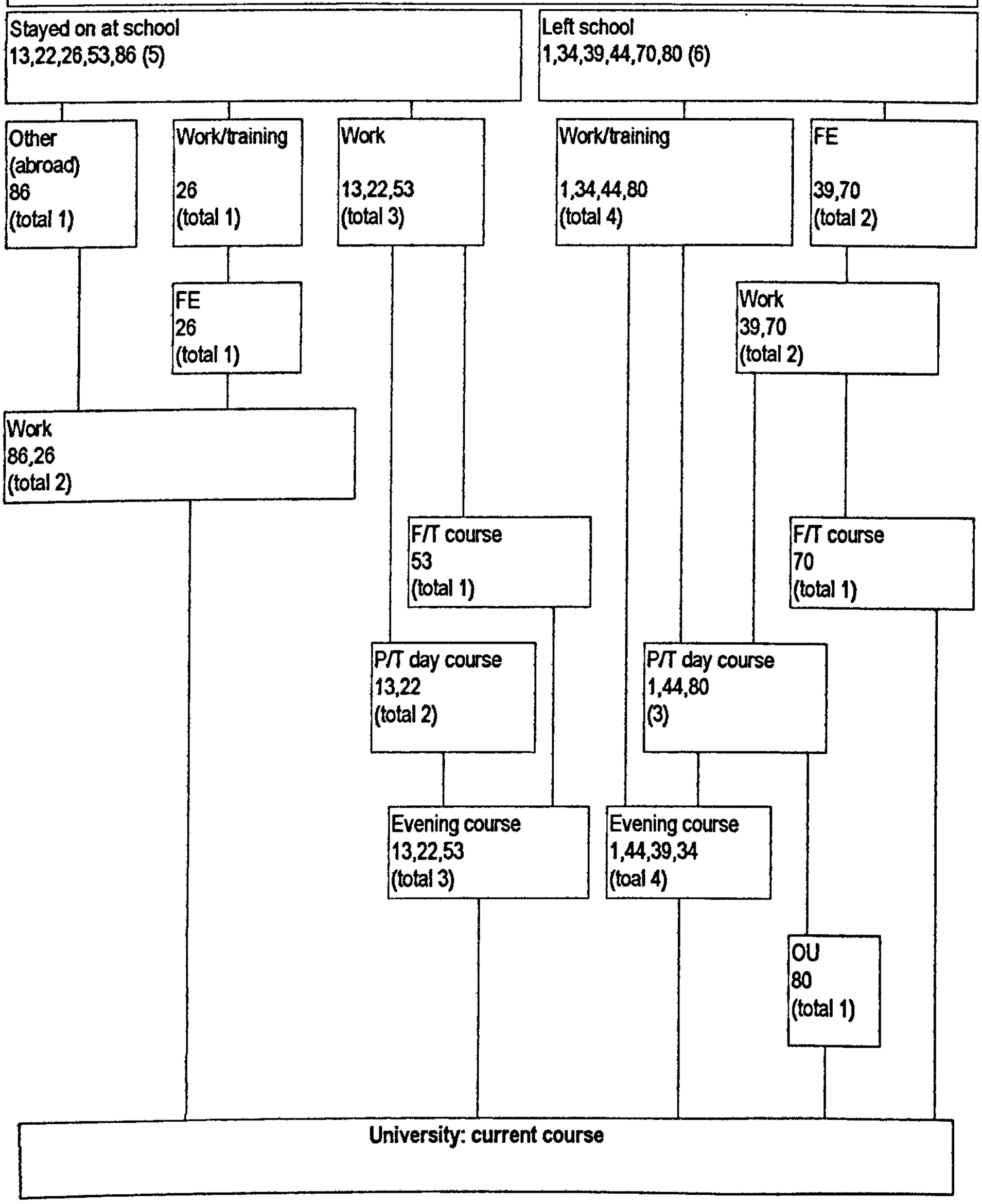


Route E

Students who gained university entrance through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.

BEd Secondary. Male

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	26,39,70,86, 34	53	1	13	22,80	44	0	
(0)	(5)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(0)	(11)

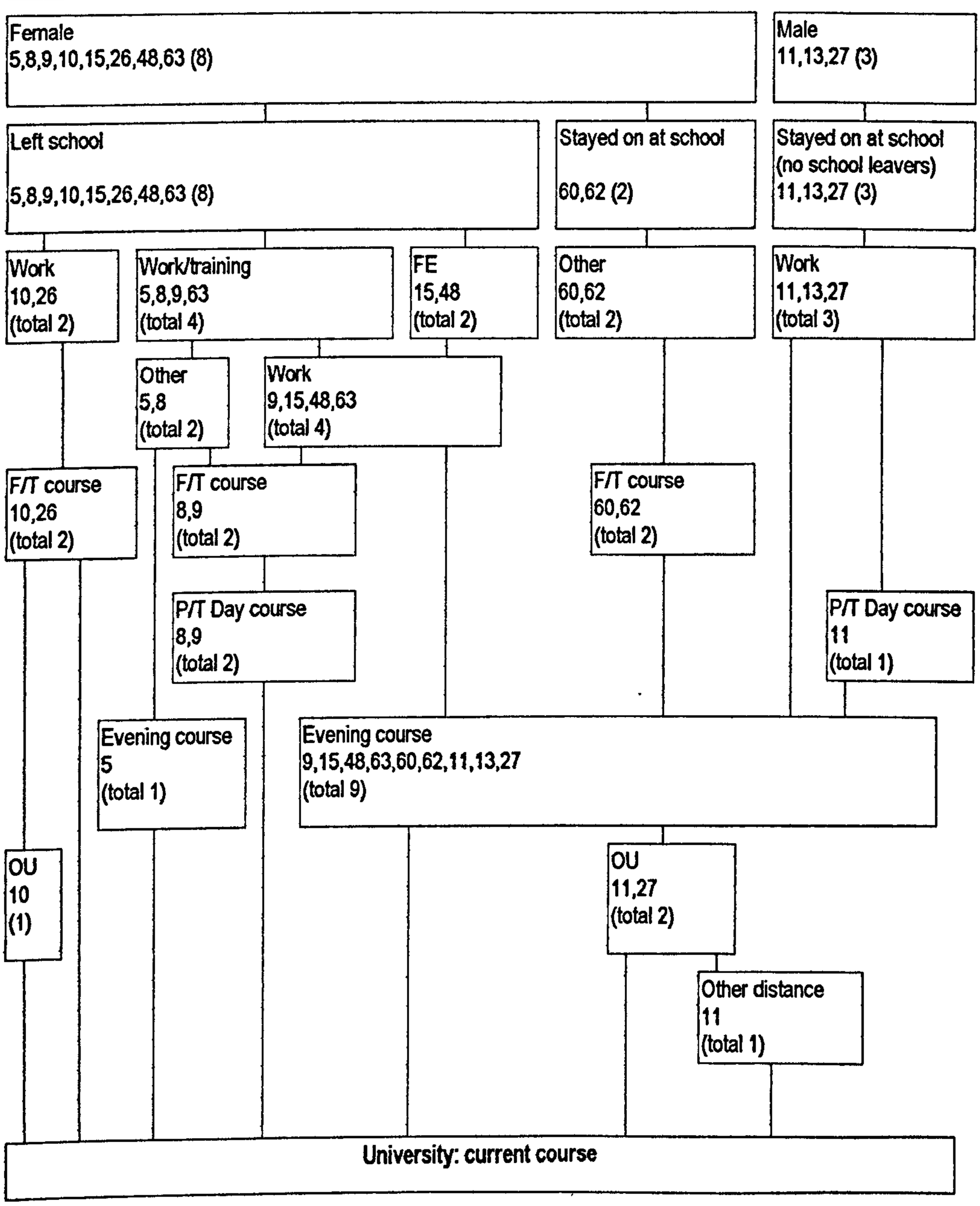


Route E

Students who gained university entrance through involvement in a range of different types of educational provision other than Access courses: part-time day, OU, other distance learning etc.

MODDS

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	5,8,13,15,26, 60	48	27	9	10,11,62	0	63	
(0)	(6)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(3)	(0)	(1)	13



Route F. B Ed Primary

Sturndents who entered via a vocational route ie those who gained vocational qualifications as part of their training for a form of employment.

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	0	0	18	69	0	0	0	
(0)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	2

Male
69(1)

Female
18(1)

Left school
69(1)

Stayed on at school
18(1)

Work
69(1)
(motor mechanic)

Work/training
18(1)

City and Guilds
A.M.I.M.I
Professional qualifications

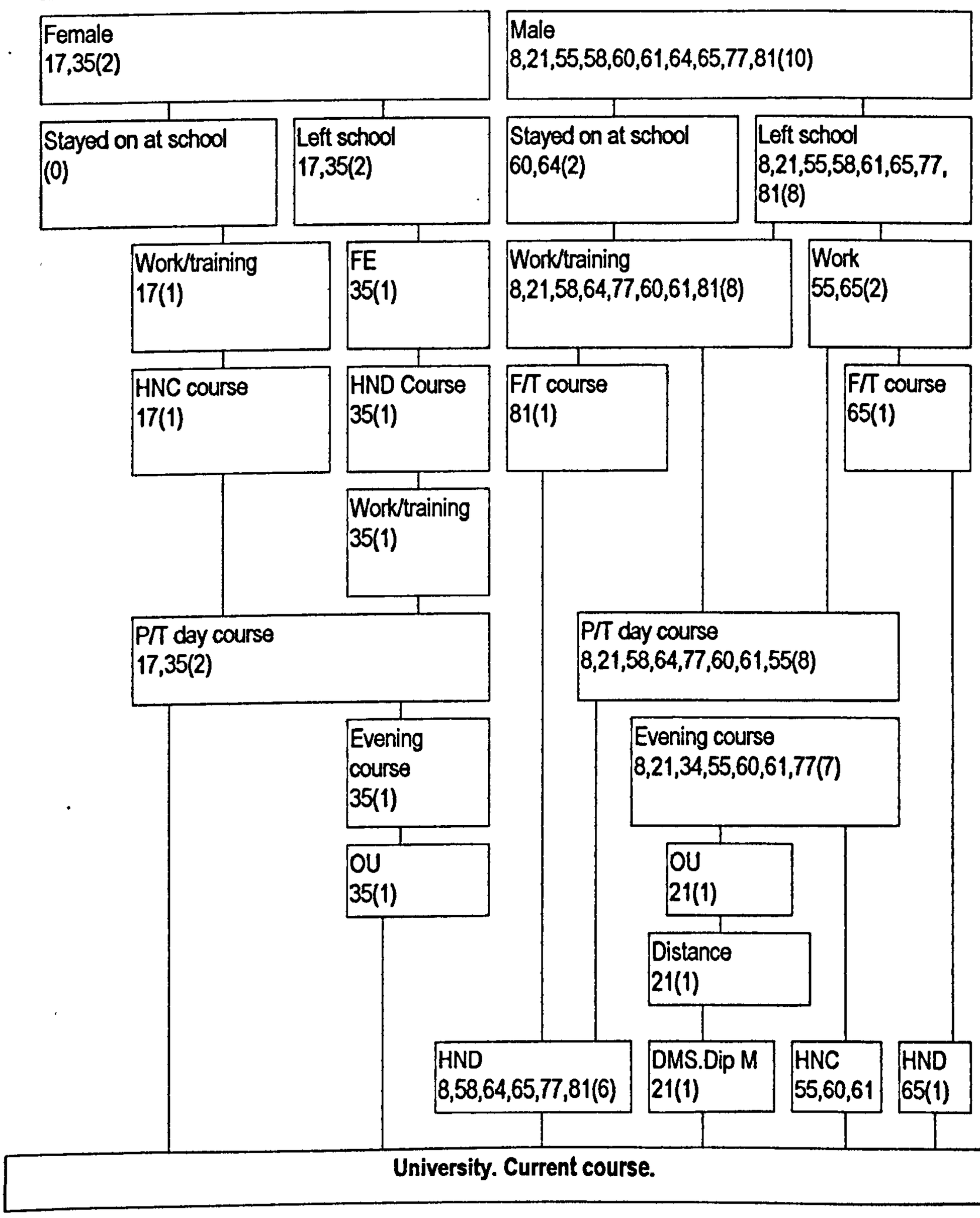
Occupation lisIted as quantity suveyor.
No additional qualifications given. Also period as "housewife".

University. Current course.

Route F. Secondary B Ed

Students who entered via a vocational route ie those who gained vocational qualifications as part of their training for a form of employment.

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	8,65	35,55,58 61	77	17,60,81	0	21,64	0	
(0)	(2)	(4)	(1)	(3)	(0)	(2)	(0)	12



Route F MODDS

Students who entered university via a vocational route i.e. those who gained qualifications which are acceptable for university entrance as part of their training for a form of employment.

1 only student
Female. Age group 20 to 24
36(1)

Stayed on at school
36(1)

Work/training
36(1)

Part-time day course
36(1)

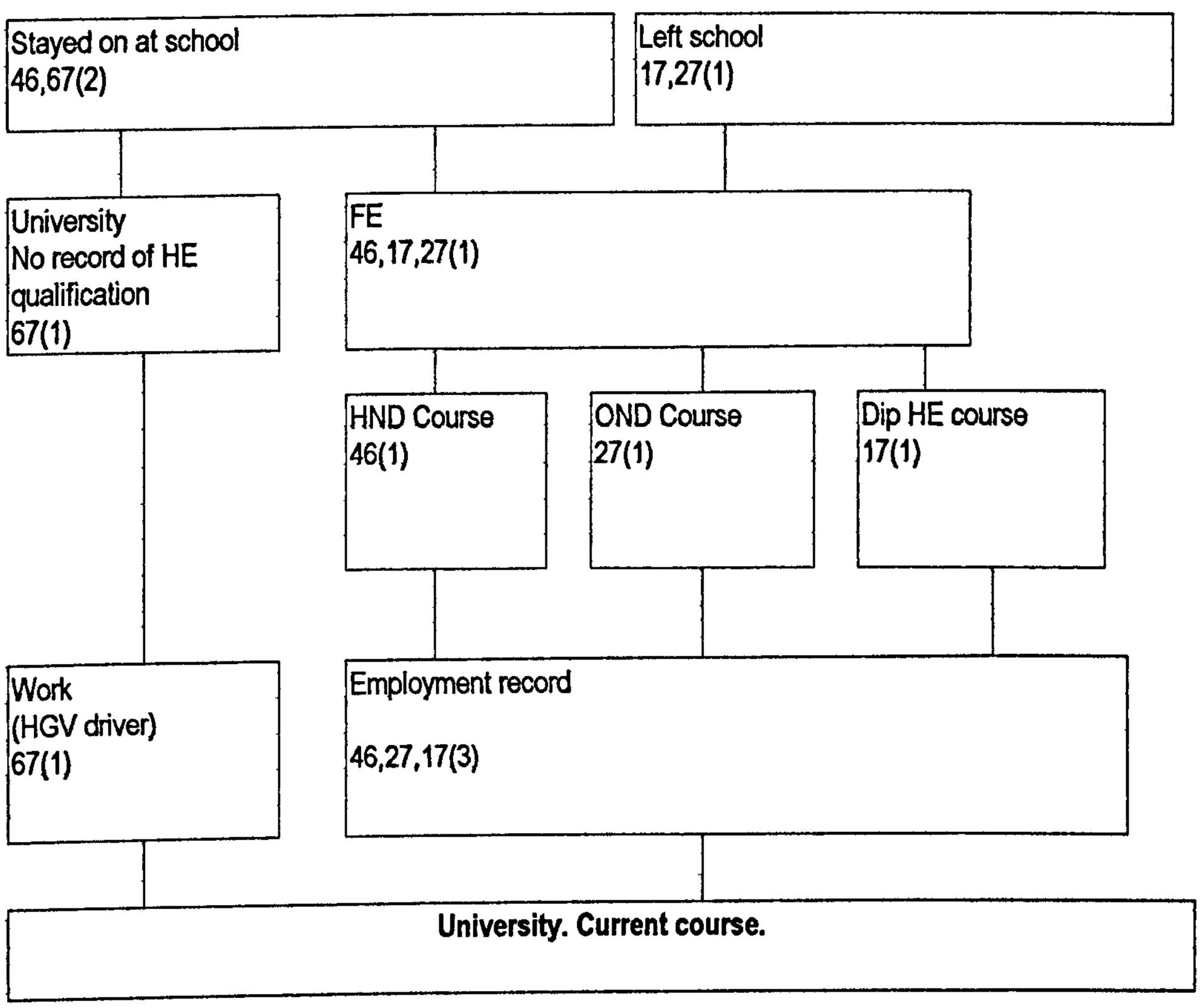
Degree
36(1)

University. Current course.

Route G. B Ed Primary.

Students who had been in the higher education system prior to their current course

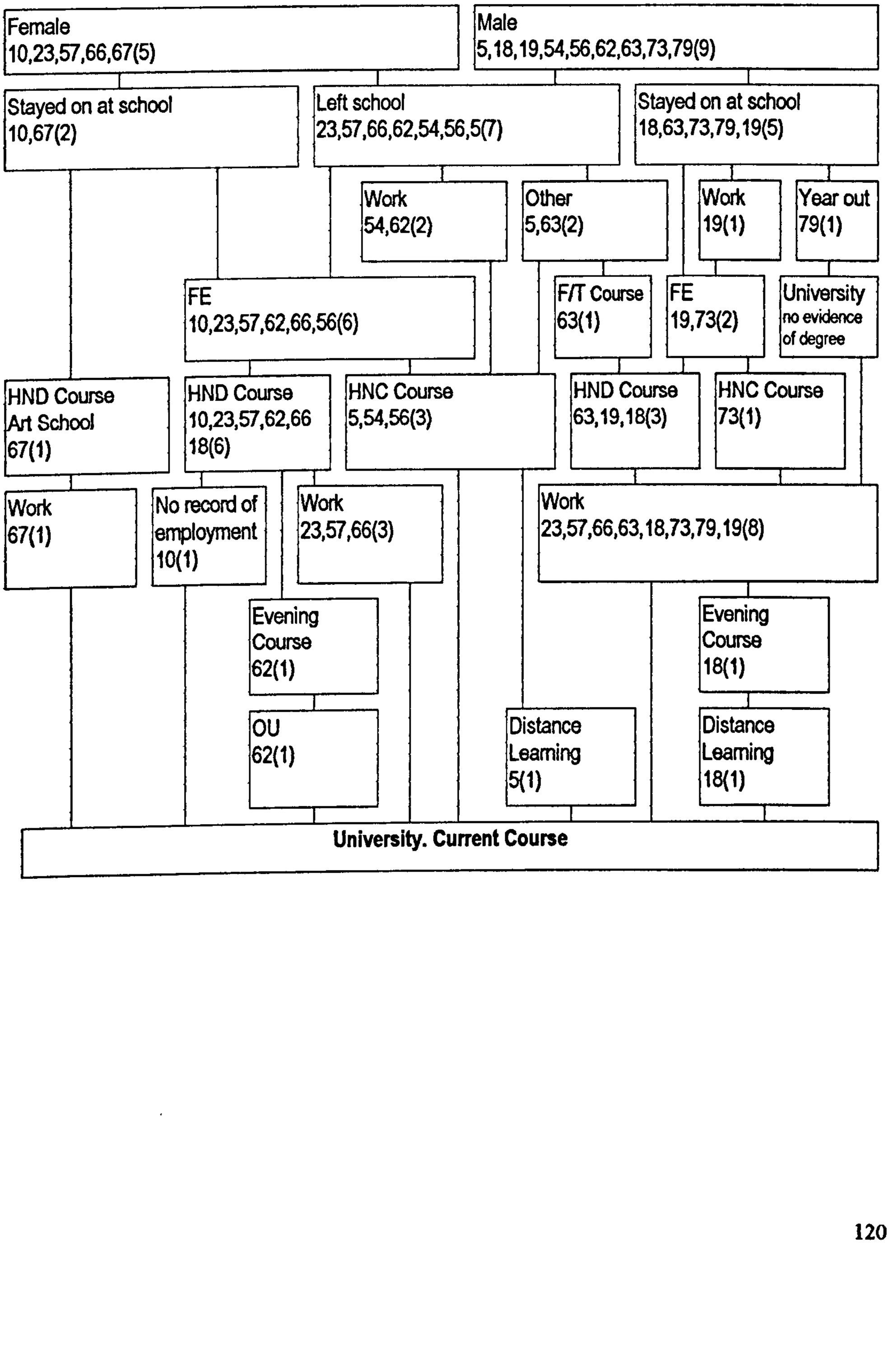
Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	27,46	17,67	0	0	0	0	0	
(0)	(2)	(2)	(0)	0	(0)	(0)	(0)	4



Route G. B Ed Secondary

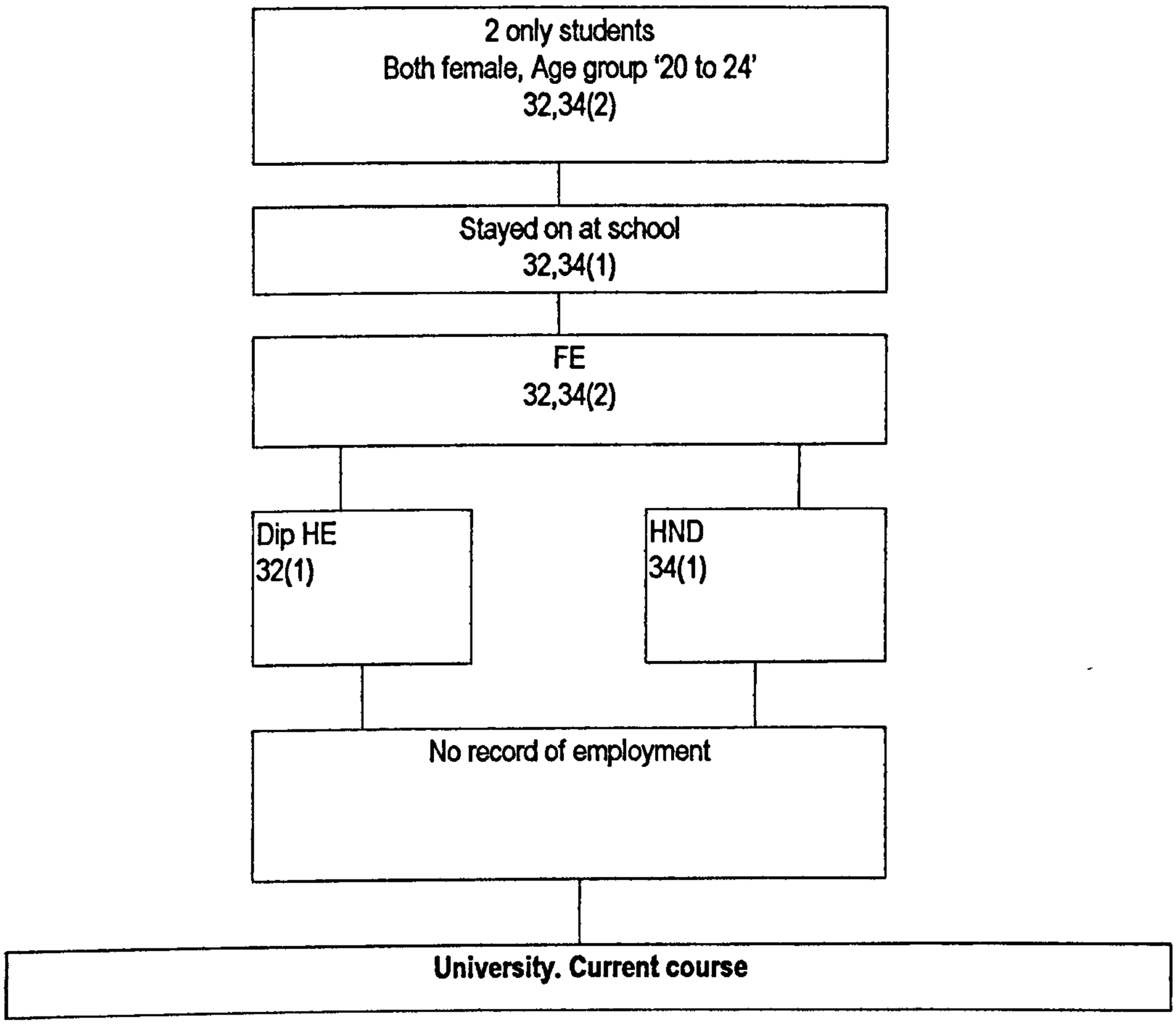
Students who had been in the higher education system prior to their current course

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	5,10,18,23 57,66	19,63,67	54,79		73	56,62	0	
(0)	(6)	(3)	(2)	(0)	(1)	(2)	(0)	14



Route G. MODDS

Students who had been in the higher education system prior to their current course



Route H. B Ed Secondary

Students who obtained the qualifications neccessary for university entrance during their school career (or equivalent FE programme), left the education system and entered university at a later date. In the meantime they had no contact with the education system.

Age Groups								
under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	8,65	35,55,58 61	77	17,60,81	0	21,64	0	
(0)	(2)	(4)	(1)	(3)	(0)	(2)	(0)	12

All female
7,33,59(3)

Stayed on at school
7,33,59(3)

Work
7,33,59(3)

University. Current course

Route H. MODDS

Age Groups

under 20	*20 to 24*	*25 to 29*	*30 to 34*	*35 to 39*	*40 to 44*	*45 to 49*	*over 50*	total
0	6,55,56,59 64	3,16	0	47	0		0	
(0)	(5)	(2)	0	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)	8

Female
3,16,47,55,56,59(6)

Male
6,64(2)

Stayed on at school
3,16,47(3)

Left school
55,56,59(3)

Stayed on at school
0 (0)

Left school
6,64(2)

other
3(1)

FE
55,56,59(3)

FE
64(1)

Work/training
55,59,6(3)

Has employment record
3(1)

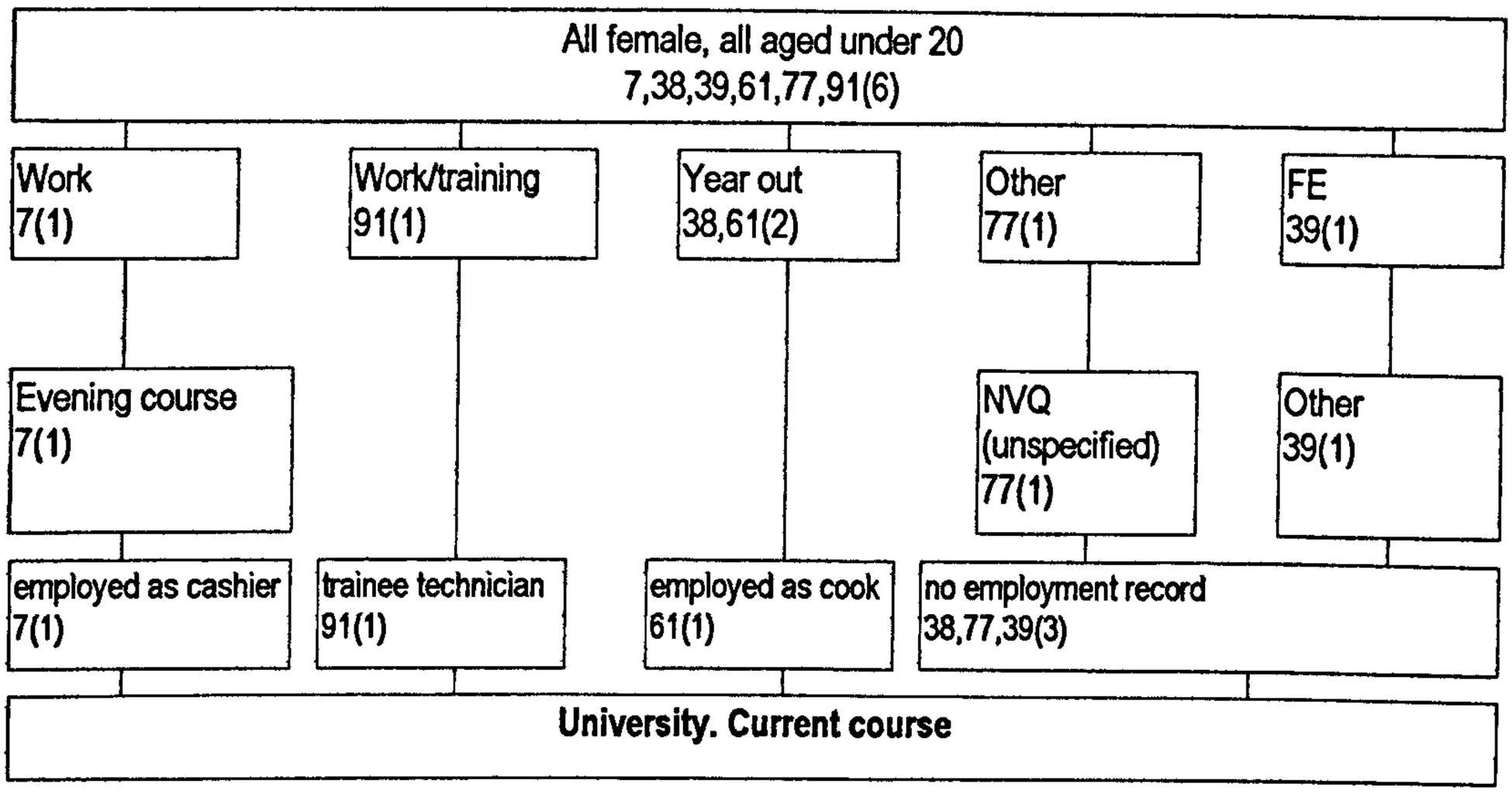
Work
16,47,56(3)

Work
64(1)

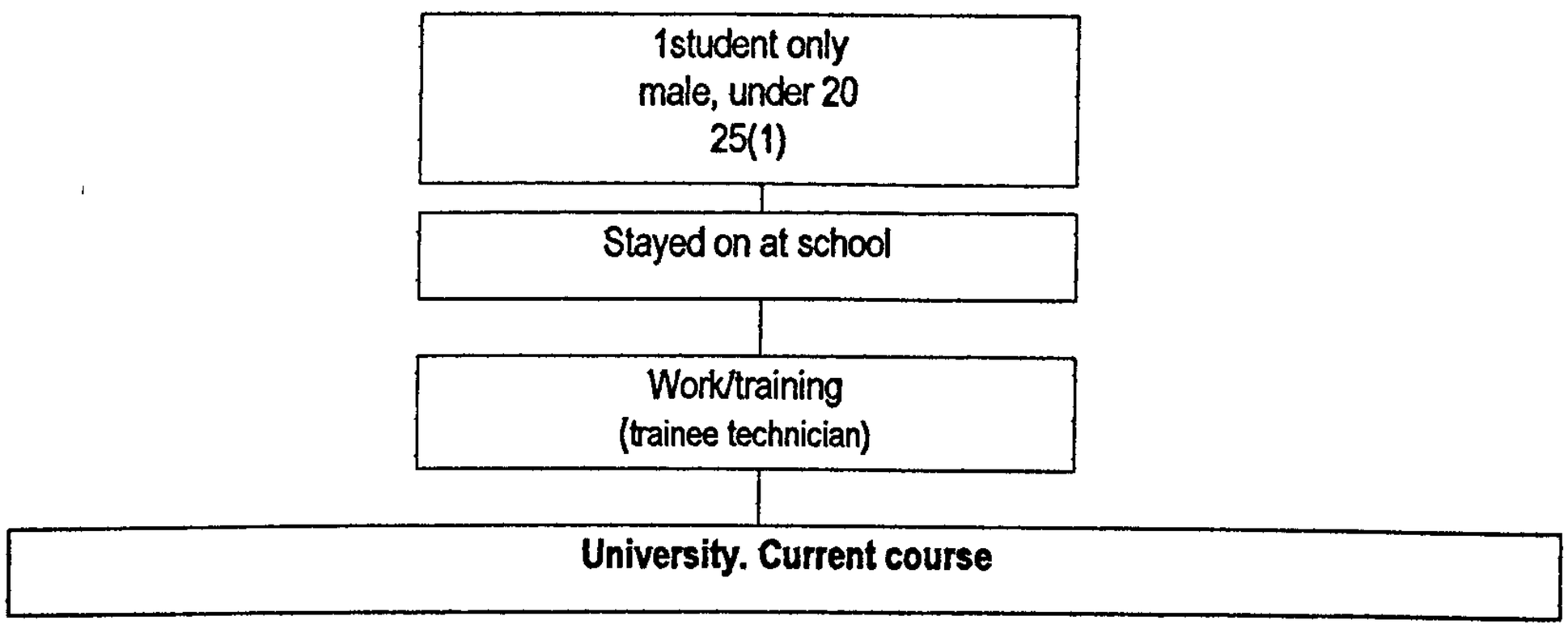
University. Current course

Route J. B Ed Primary

Students aged under 20 who took a year out prior to starting their current course.

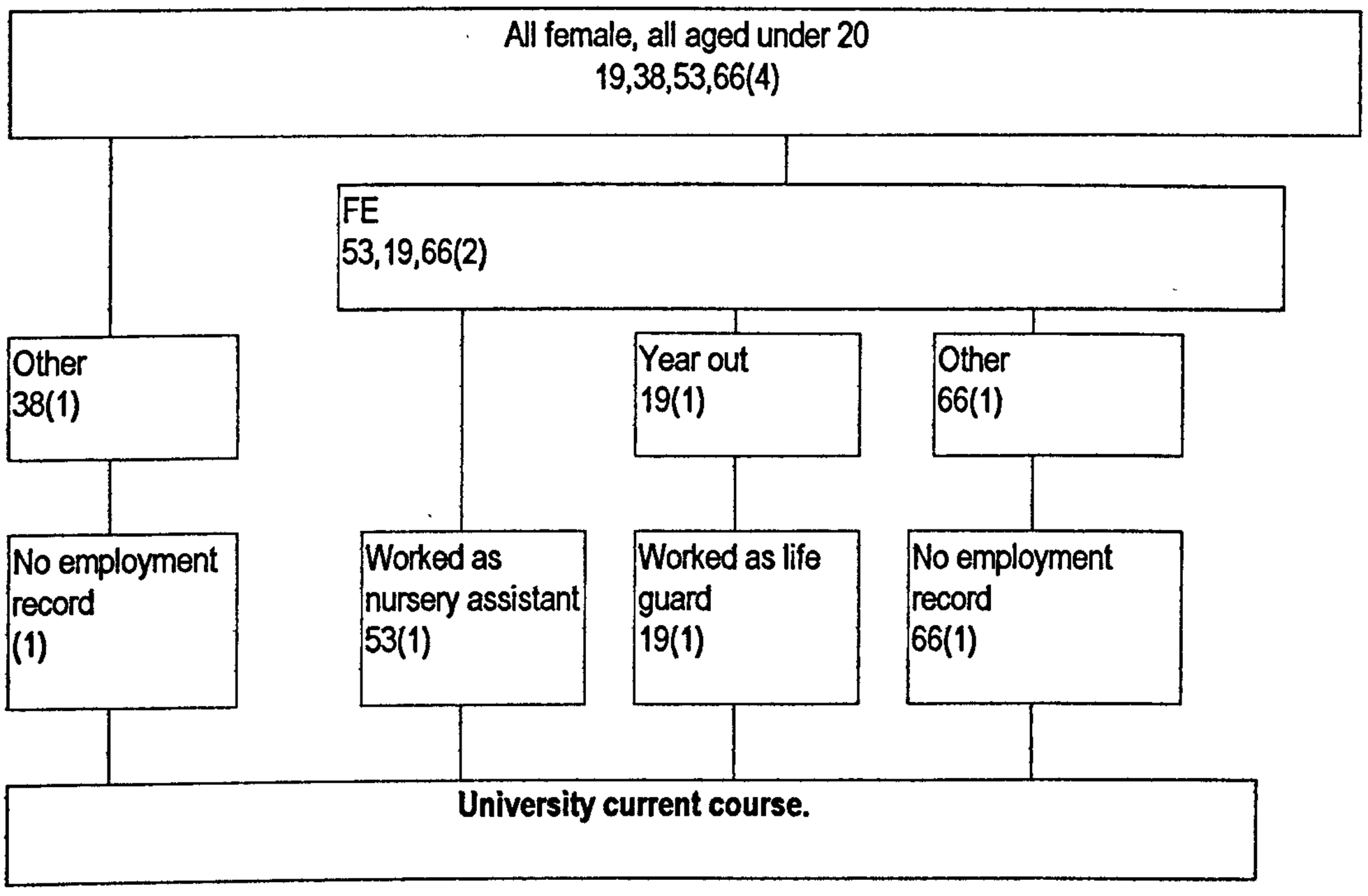


Route J. B Ed Secondary



Route J.MODDS

Students aged under 20 who took a year out or followed another alternaive prior to starting commencing their current course.



Chapter Eight. Educational experiences. Leaving School.

School leaving is significant since it represents the first stage in the route traces and for many students the key to what follows in terms of educational experience. This chapter develops the findings on education routes by exploring experiences of school leaving drawn from both elements of the study, quantitative and qualitative. Distributions taken from the questionnaire items are compared with the findings from the focus group interviews.

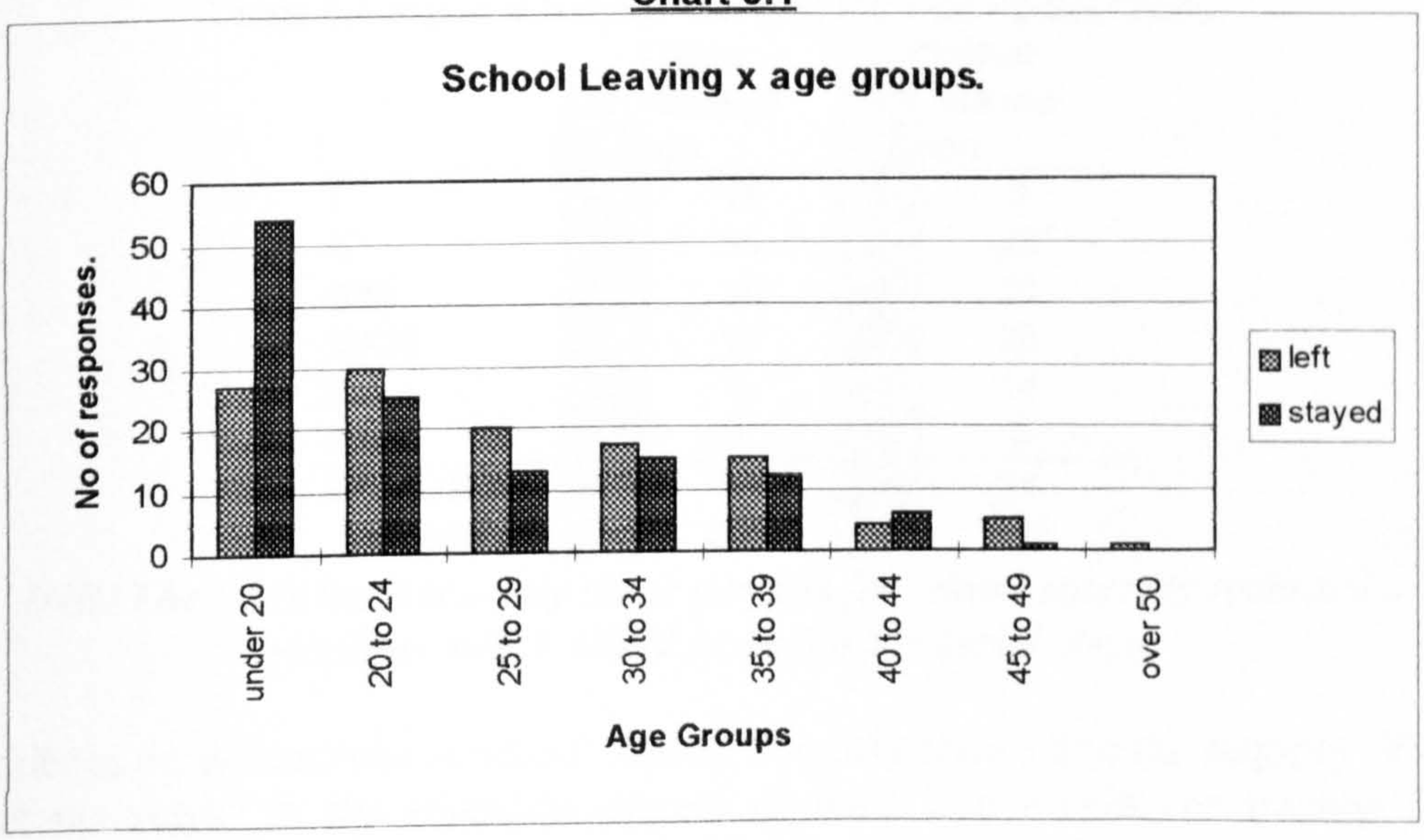
Of the whole questionnaire sample (Table 8.1) slightly more stayed on at school than left at statutory leaving age.

Table 8.1 School leaving: statutory age: all sample.

left	119	48.57%
stayed	126	51.43%
total	245	100

Age was a factor in this result. Analysis by age groups alone (Table 5.3:3, Chart 5.3:1) shows that the 'under 20' group stayed on at school in a ratio of 2:1. These students followed routes A, B, C and J and would therefore have remained in the education system in school or in further education. For the remaining age groups (apart from the '40 to 44' group}, the students were more likely to have left than stayed on but in each age group a significant proportion of the students stayed on at school. Of the 'mature' students approximately half had the opportunity to attain the qualifications for entry to university at that stage in their educational careers. Some did so, for example those who followed route G, but many selected another alternative.

Chart 8:1



Neither gender, nor gender across the age groups, seems to have contributed to this result. Gender difference (Table 8.2) was very small with slightly more of both gender groups staying on.

Table 8.2 School leaving: Gender. All sample.

	female	%	male	%
left	84	48.27	35	49.3
stayed	90	51.73	36	50.7
total	174	100	71	100
total sample	245			

Comparison of age groups with gender also indicated little variation. (Table 8.3)

Table 8.3 School leaving: gender and age groups.

	left			stayed		
	female	male	total	female	male	total
under 20	24	3	27	42	12	54
20 to 24	18	12	30	16	9	25
25 to 29	13	7	20	9	4	13
30 to 34	13	4	17	11	4	15
35 to 39	12	3	15	9	3	12
40 to 44	2	2	4	3	3	6
45 to 49	1	4	5	0	1	1
over 50	1	0	1	0	0	0
	84	35	119	90	36	126

The social class of parents, father or mother, among the sample had little influence on rates of staying on at school (Table 8.4). The high correlation between findings for mothers' and fathers' occupations as stated support this. The under-representation of social classes IV and V in the sample must be borne in mind.

Table 8.4 Student School leaving: Parents Social Class.

	father		mother	
	Left	Stayed on	Left	Stayed on
I	13	16	0	0
II	31	35	23	25
IIIM	39	38	9	10
IIINM	4	12	26	25
IV	7	4	13	14
V	1	1	5	0
sub-total	95	106	76	74
Correlation		0.97		0.98

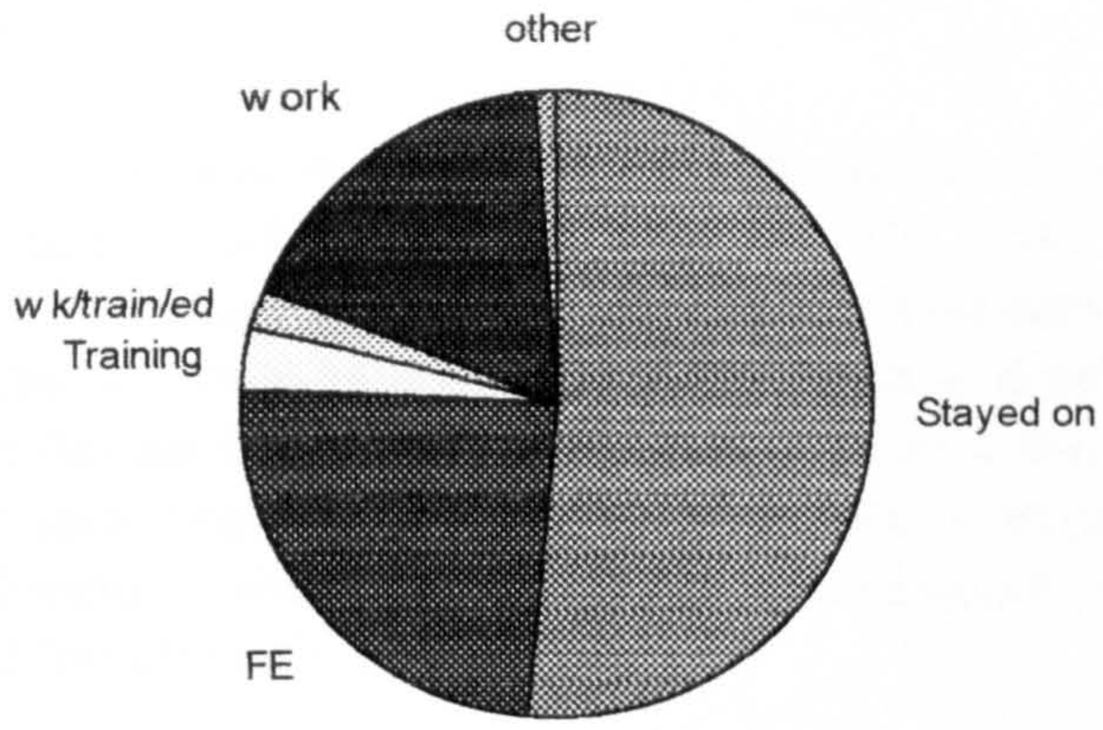
(NB. The table includes only those parents for whom students recorded a response which could be coded for social class)

Evidence on destinations at school leaving however shows that the majority of the students stayed in the education system or went into training or training and education. Of the students who left school at statutory age (Chart 8.2) 59 (over 24

% of the whole sample) went directly into FE which means that over three quarters of the whole sample stayed in the education system full-time beyond statutory school leaving age. A further group of 13 went into work which offered training, or training and education, which means that 198 students (total sample 245) or 80.8% of the sample stayed full-time in the education system or went into vocational training on leaving school. This findings is supported, both in the social class of the students' own occupations, their involvement in professional or skilled occupations, and in their commitment to continuing education as shown in the route traces.

Chart 8:2

Destinations at Statutory School Leaving Age: all sample.



Data on school leaving alone can therefore be misleading if considered in isolation of the take-up of alternative forms of education and vocational training on offer.

Further analysis using the routes data and other items from the questionnaire shows that of those 44 students who left school and went to work:

- a further 22 subsequently went into work which offered training and of these 6 gained the qualifications to enter university as a result of that training
- of the 22 remaining students 11 had no further contact with the education system until they took an Access course and 11 re-entered the education system by another route at a later stage.

Taking out the 'under 20' group, who either entered university direct or after taking a 'year out' it becomes possible to analyse the 'mature' student group in more detail. Of the 72 students over the age of 20 who stayed on at school, 5 entered university on to their current course after leaving further education (younger students in the '20 to 24' age group), another 11 took courses in higher education prior to their current course and a further 4 students obtained the qualifications for university entrance through vocational training related to their work. Of the remainder, 6 students took an Access course before entering their

current course and 34 took a variety of post school courses. 11 used the qualifications gained at school to gain entry to their current course.

Analysis of the questionnaire data by both distributions and routes, and data on the social class of students, suggests that the increase in 'adult returners' into higher education is more a process of 're-cycling' than of drawing on 'new material'. This is not to deprecate the progress made but suggests that currently there remain untapped reserves of ability in the population.

Data presented thus far offers information on what happened to the questionnaire sample at school leaving age. Results from the qualitative samples provide information on the experiences of students and throw light on decision-making at school leaving age.

It is recognised that comparison between the experiences of the Access groups while at school, and at school leaving age, and the sixth formers must be considered in the light of age differences between the two samples. For the sixth formers school was an immediate ongoing experience and reflection was short term, while for the Access students school experience was a matter of recollection, looking back over some years of intervening experience. Comparison between the samples is not therefore direct but takes the contributions of each group of students as valid at the time of data collection.

Table 8.5 6th form students. Summary of views on alternatives at school leaving age.

work	6th form	FE	YT
	favourable	unfavourable	
low paid job, no future good jobs need A-levels money in the pocket now but no future people who get work have now 'reached their peak' group responses: Interview 2. To question *Did any of you think of leaving and going to work?* A number of responses. No. Some nervous laughter	know the staff know other pupils most of your friends were staying on to know how school operates security It's what you are used to 2 more years to decide what you want to do provides disciplined environment, 'pushed', 'encouraged' all time timetabled completion of work checked and 'chased up' Need additional study, might as well do it somewhere familiar	starting again fitting 6 years in to 2 years provides freedom but also 'temptation' to 'mess about' not 'pushed' allowed free time outside formal lessons Left to you're own devices work not checked or 'chased up' Local institutions not very good	Group response Interview 1 To question *What about YT?* Laughter, A number of responses. No. Head shaking. No, slave labour. Pay is poor No security No guarantee of a job Too specialised It's exploited on YT. Basically, to get you off the streets Too specialised It still runs but it's not as popular as it used to be For people who have not got many alternatives
	Unfavourable	**favourable**	
	teachers push you around having to sign a contract	better facilities	

Contributors to the sixth form focus groups recognised that there were alternatives available to them at a school leaving age: to enrol onto a Youth Training scheme, to leave school and get a job, to move into further education or to stay on at school into the sixth form. The views expressed by the students are summarised in Table 8.5 (previous page)

Work.

Students offered few contributions on the alternative of leaving school and getting a job and those offered were largely derogatory.

> Group C.
> Interviewer.
> "Did anybody think about leaving and going to work?"
> A number of responses. No. Some nervous laughter.

Members of Group D supported their views of the superiority of staying in education over leaving for work from their knowledge of those who had chosen to leave school.

> Interviewer. "Do you ever see any of them (pupils who chose to leave school), do you see any of them?"
> "Well they've all got jobs but just jobs they'll have, well the same sort of jobs they'll have for the rest of their lives really, they've reached their peak."
> "They may have more money now but in the end we are going to have more than them."
> "They might have a bit of money in their pocket now so they can go out and enjoy themselves now but what's it going to be like when they've got a family, and that money is not going to stretch very far with a large family."

In the perception of the students there was little opportunity of any work worth having without at least A-levels and preferably a degree. They did not seem to have given any consideration to career development through promotion or further training within work or for the validity of qualifications outside the higher education system. They saw A-level as the 'gold standard' in terms of not only qualifications but access to careers and 'good jobs' via higher education.

Youth training.

The response to YT was uniformly negative, if not derisory, across all 4 groups. Criticisms of YT included low pay, lack of a job at the end of a programme, lack of security, "slave labour" and over-specialisation. One student felt that the programmes, though still in existence, were now "less popular" than they had been.

> "It's basically just to get you off the streets isn't it?" (In response to this comment another student asserted "Anyway, let's not go into the political side of it.")

One student saw it as being for people with fewer "options":

> "The whole thing about YTS, everybody in it views YTS as being for people who are, who have not got many other options, whereas everybody in here is quite capable of getting good A-level results and going on to university". (Another student commented "Speak for yourself".)

The general perception among the students was that the programmes were of poor quality, poorly paid, offered little future and were for people with limited choice, all of which seemed to make such programmes inappropriate for these groups of students.

Staying on in education.

Negative views of the alternatives available at school leaving were countered with positive views of staying in education. Among the specific reasons offered in favour of continuing education were:

> "A better chance of getting a job."
> "To try to get more qualifications."
> "To broaden your horizons by getting better qualifications. I felt personally that to get A-levels you .... you broaden your career horizons."
> "Because I wanted to go to university."

Staying on also offered additional time to make decisions concerning the future.

> "It's an extra 2 years to decide what you want to do."

One student felt that he had little choice in the matter since his mum told him "he had to" stay on.

Sixth form or Further Education.

For all of the school students in the sample staying in the education system offered the only viable alternative at school leaving age and, therefore, the future depended on a choice between school and FE. A number of the students had considered FE as an alternative to the sixth form but offered a variety of reasons for staying on at school. The familiarity and security of an environment in which they had spent a long period of time were major factors.

> "It's an easy extra 2 years, well it isn't easy but its not a change. It's not like you've got to go somewhere else. Because you know everyone as well."
> "Because you know everybody. You know the teachers, you know how the school works and its what you are used to."
> "You can't really get that far as well. Well it depends. If you've got a course in mind you can go off and do BTEC and other things but most people want to do A-levels, and, yes, I agree, it's like security and you know where you are."
> "It's starting again isn't it? You've got to start again".

Perceived differences in teaching/learning style between sixth form and FE was also a factor. A number of students felt that they needed the "regime" of school in order to work effectively:

> "Courses are good if you know what you want to do but I wanted to do A-levels and being here I wanted the extra, I suppose in a way, the extra security of school, but also being told we need this piece of work in, whereas in college you are left to your own devices and I needed that kick up the backside."
> "I didn't though 'cos I came here new from my other school. I was going to go to college but I thought I'd do better at school. I'm not, I don't work very hard unless I'm pushed."
> "If I'd gone to college I think I would have done really badly because I need someone to kick me up the arse basically."
> "It seems like at college its less work and more fun. I decided to come here because I want to work and I don't want to waste my time. I'd rather work and get it over with."
> "And also if you've got essays and projects to do they don't even chase it up. They just say if you hand it in you do" ..... "I actually do a part time course at college as well. We were asked to do some essays a couple of weeks ago. Nobody did them."

The result of this approach was perceived by the students to be a high drop out rate:

> "Most of my friends they've dropped out of college now, like people I knew last year" .... "Half of them are at work, half of them are just at home."

There was also a poor perception of the quality of FE colleges.

> "But there are not many good colleges round here so this was the only choice really."" ..... college, that's where I would probably have gone on to. It hasn't got a very good reputation really. Sort of put me off a bit."

The students did not feel that they were "pushed" or "forced" to work at school but they were "checked up on", work was demanded, there was a lot of

encouragement and private study time was supervised. The opportunity to leave college when not actually taking a class offered the "temptation" to avoid work and 'mess about'.

With reference to the approach of the school staff:

> "Yes they check up on us and they encourage us a lot and it really makes you work."

Despite general agreement among all four groups on the superiority of the sixth form as opposed to FE, three students expressed dissatisfaction with their sixth form experience and felt that they might have been more successful in FE. One of these felt that the facilities in FE were superior while the other two expressed some dissatisfaction with the approach of the school:

> "I sometimes wish I had as well (gone into FE) I haven't enjoyed it. I can't stand the teachers bossing you around. They said they'd change when you got to the sixth form but they haven't really."

The second student objected to being required to sign a contract.

The inconsistency inherent in their argument that they had stayed at school because they needed the disciplined approach and yet they objected to the teachers 'pushing them around' did not seem to occur to the students.

The contributions on FE offered by these students suggested that they viewed it as a second rate option. This might in part reflect their need to justify their choice in staying at school but might also indicate the "street level" view of FE held by young people. The approach which FE colleges see as "more adult" is viewed by the young people as offering increased freedom and more opportunity for "fun" but also increased 'temptation', whereas the school approach is less flexible but offers a greater likelihood of "success" in terms of completing study programmes and passing examinations. Among the groups interviewed A-levels were seen as the most valued qualifications which provided access to higher education and subsequent access to "a good job". Since they wanted to study A-levels, were familiar with the school environment and FE was an inferior option there seemed little to be gained from leaving school.

The negative views of the alternatives on offer at school leaving expressed by the students are reflected in the stage in their school careers when the decided to stay on. The students arrived at their decision at varying stages in their school careers, summarised in quotations from the interviews(Table 8.6. over leaf)

A number of the students were uncertain about when they decided that they wanted to go in to higher education but traced this back to an early age. For

example, in response to the question "Can you remember when you decided to go to university?" they responded:

> "When I was about 6."
> "When I was this big."(indicating very small and later emerging to be "about 5")
> "I've always wanted to go."
> "I've always known I wanted to stay on at school." (both parents had been in HE)
> "Erm .... well, I've always wanted to go into the sixth form. I guess I have always wanted to do A-levels."
> "As long as I can remember .... what qualifications I wanted .... since the first year I have wanted to go into the sixth form."

Table 8.6 6th formers. Age on deciding to stay on at school, go into HE

prior to secondary school	On entry to secondary school	during secondary school	at statutory school leaving age or beyond
When I was about 6			
When I was this big			
When I was about 6			
I've always known I was going to stay on into the 6th form			
When I was little			
I've always wanted to go (to university)			
	since I started this school (age about 11)		
	expressions of agreement from a number of members of the group		
	Years before I made the decision		
		I think I was about 12	
		a couple of years ago (but had considered it before then)	
		probably 3rd year,	
		something like that	
		about the 4th or 5th year	
		I thought later, about the 5th year	
		when I chose my career	
			When I decided to do A-levels
			It starts in the 6th form
			I changed my mind in the 6th

The majority of the students made their decision before or at the age of 11. Those who decided in the 5th year were in the minority. The students found it difficult to provide an actual point in time at which the decision was actually made. For example when asked a direct question "Did anybody actually tell you that?" i.e. that they should stay on at school and go to university students replied:

> "No, not really, no. It's just that ...."
> "You just saw people in your family and that"

Similarly in response to "Who told you? You are all thinking about university. Who told you were clever enough?" students replied:

> "No one."
> "Yourself."
> "Results."
> "Teachers."
> "It wasn't as direct as that. It was just basically encouragement."
> "My dad did."

The actual ages offered by the students are retrospective and to be regarded with caution but they are significant in that they indicate a process, rather than a point in time, through which the idea of sixth form and higher education came to develop. The almost 'seamless' view of the progression through the 6th form into higher education became apparent at an early stage in the interviews. It was initially intended to consider school leaving and entry to higher education as analytically discrete but student contributions made this difficult.

Contributors to the Access focus group interviews offered a number of reasons for not staying on at school. These included:

- negative school experiences and a lack of encouragement to do so from either school or family or both
- financial considerations, either parents couldn't afford it or were in a financial situation in which immediate wage earning was seen to be more important
- gender, situations in which girls were not encouraged to stay on or were prevented from doing so
- a more viable option such as FE or work and training,
- lack of motivation.

For a number of students staying on was not an alternative to be considered either by their schools or their parents.

> Interviewer. "Can we try and look a back a little further now? If we go back as far as school. Did you see when you were at school university as a possibility for you?
> "Forget it."
> "No, none whatsoever."
> "It was just leave school and try to find a job if you could."
> "When I left school jobs were easy to get, you know. You left school and got a job."
> "I said in secondary schools I don't think it was pressured that much. I mean, I went to school. At sixteen that was it, goodbye, off you go, you're back into the outside world now. I just got a job straight away."

A number of students cited very negative general experiences of school:

> "It (school) was abusive. It was aggressive, a bad area, it was really aggressive. The teachers didn't really care, they couldn't care less. I was just rejected everyday and you could just .... if you could be bothered to go to class you couldn't be bothered to learn. And it was just a waste. It was a shame, you know."
> "Yes. My experience was about the same as his. The school we .... I went to wasn't good. I think I was probably a 3 day a week lad. And .... erm .... a lot of our teachers were very aggressive as well, the school was aggressive as well and it was a case of going just to keep the .... er .... truant man from your door, I think."
> "My experience was I moved into a bad area. There was no help, there was no encouragement. I was bullied at school. I was a bullied child even after school. There was no support at the school."
> "Insufficicnt". "The standard of teaching wasn't .... there isn't .... it could be lack of resources but the standard of education isn't sufficient .... to prompt you ...."
> "I thought about (staying on) it but it but I was bored, I didn't want to be in that environment, I just wanted to get out."

Some students in the sample enjoyed school and some stayed on into the sixth form but saw their own lack of motivation or ability as a major cause of poor school attainment.

> "I enjoyed school. I was just lazy though. At first it was great, it was a new experience and then it would get harder and in the end I would just sort of opt for the easy way and not do it."
> "It's just something you come to yourself, I think. I mean me, personally, I pratted around a lot basically. I liked school but not for the education side. I used to like the social life. I used to get all my free fags there."
> "I did stay on at school but .... erm the way I .... I look back now .... you look back at things .... you think, well, why do they put things like A-level and O-levels there when you're in the same age, you're looking for boys and staying out late. All those things, so that the balance shifted for me. More going out and enjoying myself. So that looking back I probably would have been able to do it."
> "I always enjoyed school but I didn't think I was very clever. So whether that was because I was never encouraged to think that I'm not quite sure looking back."
> "I stopped on but I just lost interest."

Considering the data from the focus groups in terms of routes it offers some indication of the factors which lead to the production of routes A, B, and C. Student choice of course and subject may have had an effect on embarking on routes A or B. For example, Some of the students in the questionnaire sample had studied BTEC which was not available in schools and it is reasonable to assume that the availability of subject options in school and college may also have affected

the route followed. Structural factors may also have been involved. Some schools, and some local authorities, for example, do not offer a sixth form. The perceived differences expressed by the sixth formers between school and college in terms of learning approach and ethos will also have affected student decisions. Failure or disillusionment in the sixth form found among both the schools and Access focus groups provides some indication for the existence of route C.

Comparison between the school students and some of the Access students shows significant differences and indicates factors which influenced students to stay on at school or leave. The sixth formers saw no viable alternative to staying on at school and entering higher education and for many the decision was made a long time before it was necessary to do so. Though they were aware of the alternatives available to them they had not given any real consideration to these since staying on was perceived as the appropriate route. The students shared a positive school experience. They had gained sufficient GCSEs to enter an established sixth form and were now looking forward optimistically towards university entrance. The attitudes expressed towards school and teachers was, in the main, ambivalent rather than critical or laudatory, but a recognition of encouragement from teachers as well as practical help was universal across all of the interviews. The findings support the results of Roberts and Higgens (1992 p.28) that staying on and entering higher education was in effect a non-decision for the sixth form students.

The Access experience of school was more diverse, significantly less successful and characterised by degrees of dissatisfaction and disappointment. They were more critical of schools and teachers and their responses were more emotive. In contrast to the experiences of the sixth formers, there was evidence that a number of the Access students attended schools in which there was no tradition of university entrance: a response to staying on at school similar to that found by Heathfield and Wakeford (1990 cited this study Chapter 2 pp.30-33). Some of the Access students made a positive choice of a route alternative to staying on as is shown in the routes diagrams.

Summary

Consideration of the results thus far in terms of the theoretical framework and the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) can (again, as at the end of the last chapter) only be partial since the other elements of the model and the findings on advice guidance and influences will be considered later. Accepting this, there is evidence that the model components operating to influence the sixth formers, education and social milieu, were positively directed towards staying on at school and these influences had been in operation for some time. The sixth formers recognised and dismissed alternative options. The operation of the same model components, education and social milieu, upon a number of the Access students were, alternatively, negative or ambivalent as demonstrated in unsatisfactory school experiences and lack of support from home.

Both groups of students referred to 'lack of options'; the sixth formers saw themselves as having a number of options which others did not have, while the Access students saw themselves as lacking in options. This, together with the age at which the sixth formers decided to stay on, suggests that by school leaving age the two groups of students already had very different perceptions of their situation and of their future. The interaction between prior experiences at home and at school therefore resulted in the likelihood that one group of students would pursue a route leading directly into higher education and another into other alternatives. Subsequent argument (including Chapter 12) will suggest that social milieu, and particularly parents, was the more significant influence but in developing the argument it is first necessary to consider the study data in terms of the other model components. The next chapter deals with the influence of employment and unemployment on entry to higher education.

Chapter Nine. Other life experiences: employment.

This chapter is concerned with the effects of employment and unemployment on entry to university and the interaction between these and other components of the model. The results of both the questionnaire and focus group interviews are used to explore student experiences.

Student experience of employment.

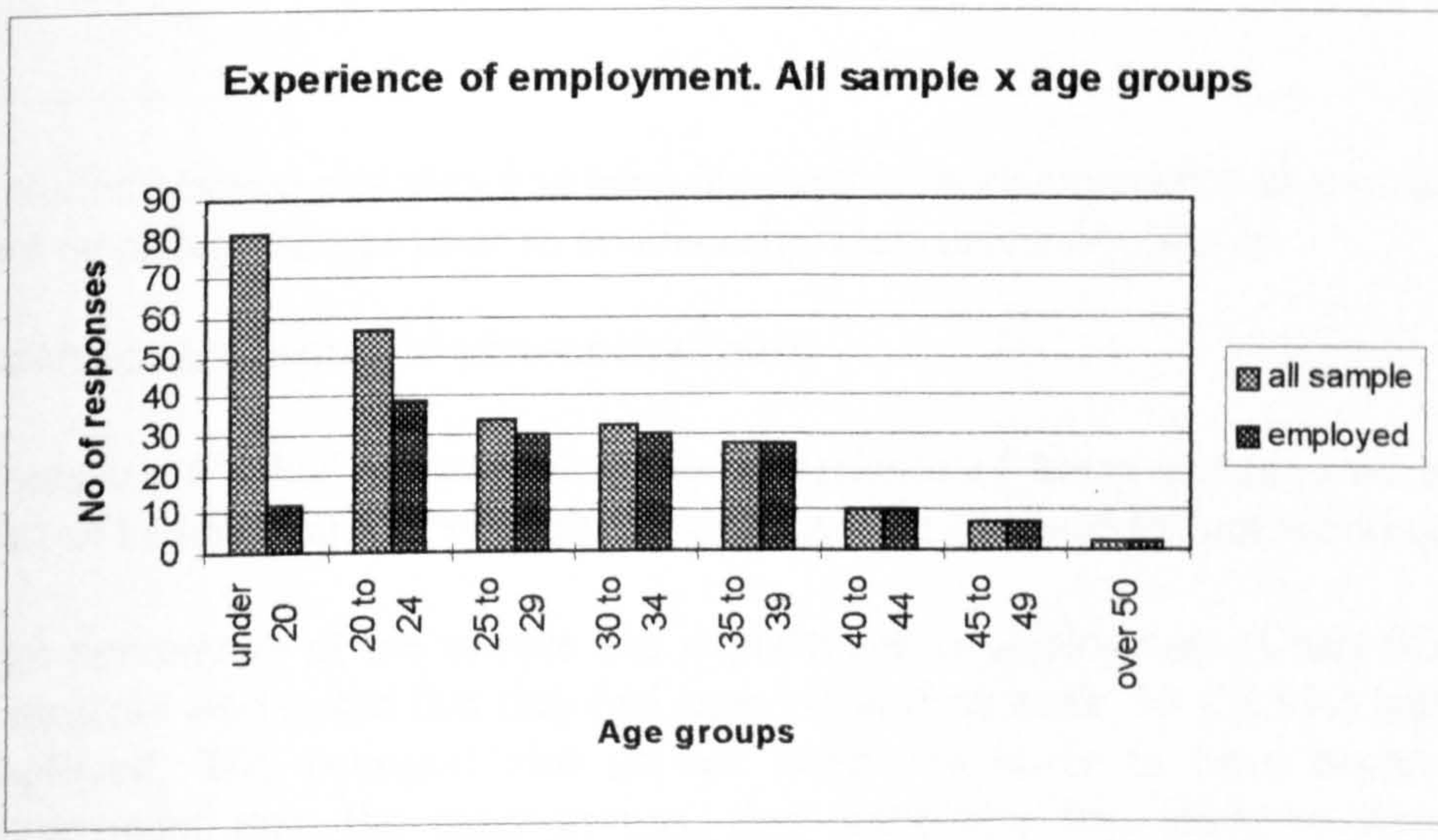
Students in the questionnaire sample were asked whether they had gained experience of full-time employment prior to commencing their university course. The possible significance of part-time work was recognised but it was decided to concentrate on full-time work and what students regarded as their 'main' employment, that is, work commensurate with their qualifications and experience.

The results indicated (Table 9.1) that almost 63% of the sample had gained experience of work and that this experience varied in accordance with age (Chart 9.1). Only some 14% of the under 20 age group, the "traditional" university students, had been in full-time work. This included those in Group J who had taken a 'year out' before commencing their course. It is reasonable to assume that the younger members of the 20 to 24 age group also fell into the 'traditional' category. On the basis of this evidence routes A, B, C and J have little significance in this element of the study.

Table 9.1 Questionnaire sample. Student experience of employment. All sample.

all sample	experience of employment	per cent
251	158	62.95

Chart 9.1



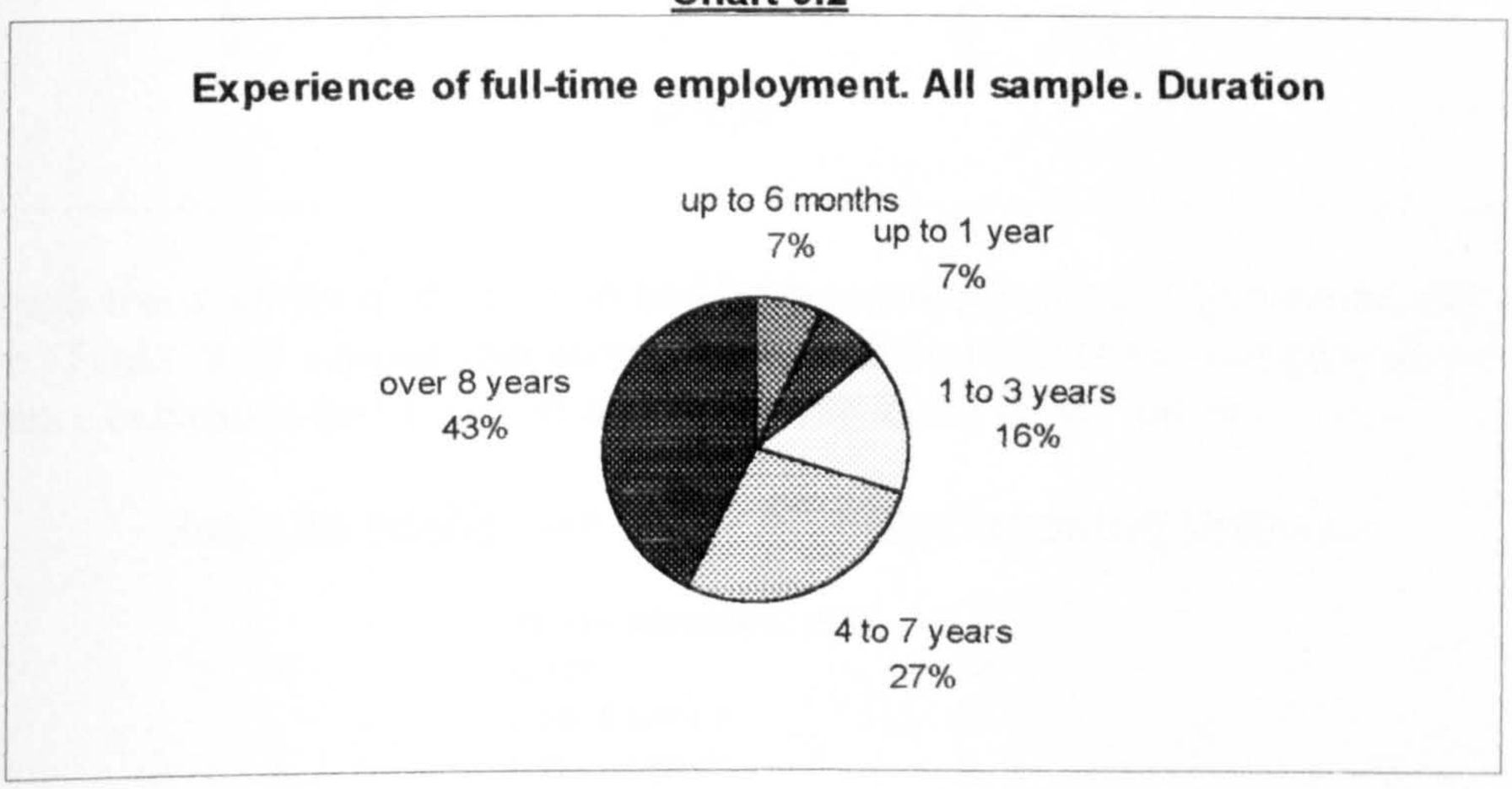
Despite the larger number of females in the sample a greater percentage of the males had gained experience of full-time work (Table 9.2). This finding is also a related to age: the sample contained a larger number of young women, particularly on the B Ed Primary Course who had not been in employment.

Table 9.2 Experience of employment: all sample, Gender.

female			male		
experience of employment	all sample	%	experience of employment	all sample	%
98	178	55.06	60	73	82.19

Data on duration of employment experience were also collected. The evidence showed (Chart 9.2) that the majority of those who had been in full-time work (70%) had worked for over 4 years while 42% had been in employment for over 8 years. Work had therefore been a significant factor in their lives. The more mature students had been at work for a longer period of their lives and had moved increasingly towards occupations in social class II.(see Chapter 6)

Chart 9.2



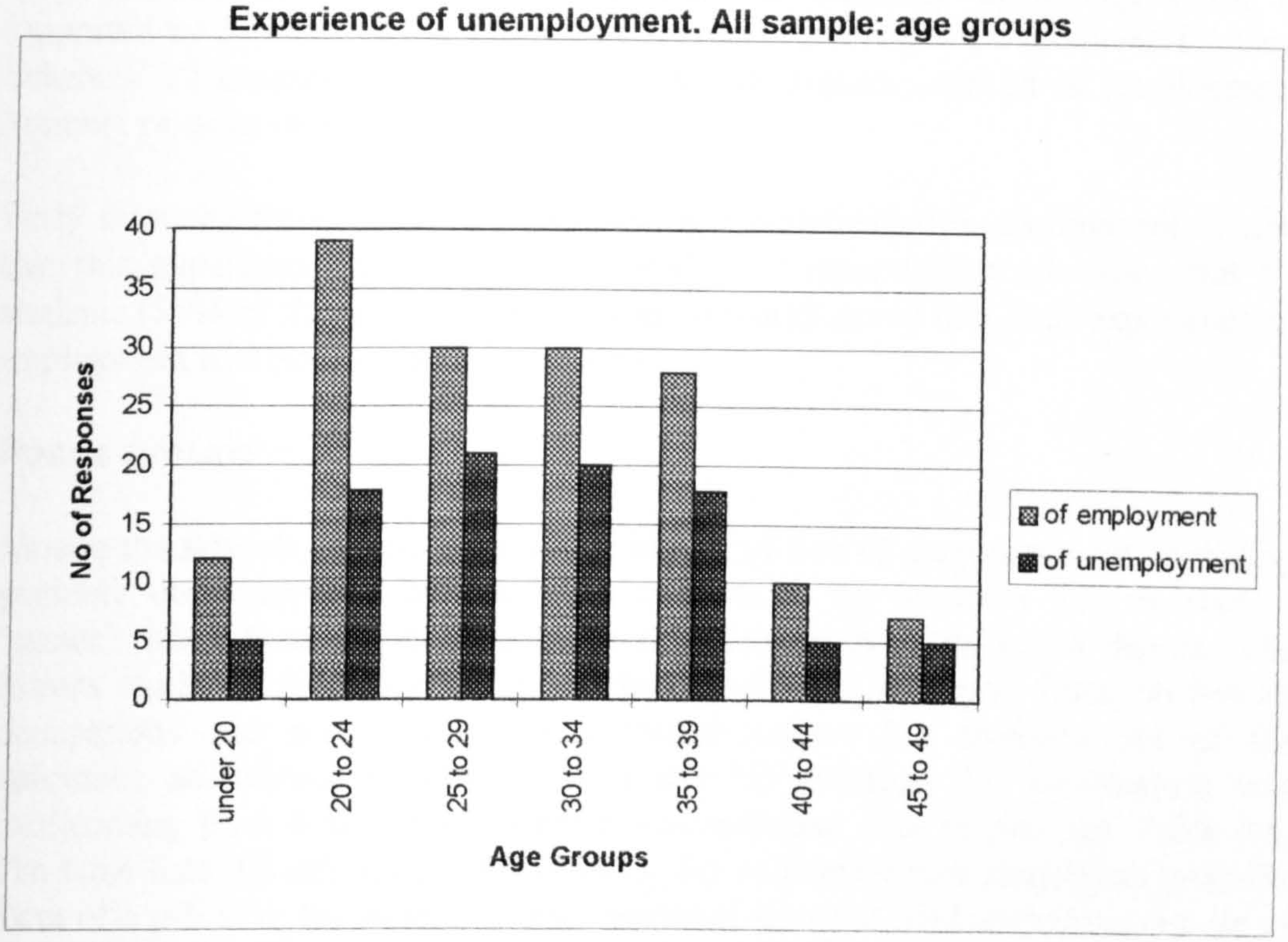
106 students stated that they had been involved in work experience as part of their school or college course prior to commencing their university course.

Student experience of unemployment.

Students were asked whether they had experience of being unemployed and in receipt of benefit, that is, "officially" unemployed as opposed to "not working".

A high percentage of the sample had experienced unemployment (Chart 9:3). Of 158 students who stated that they had been in full-time work 93 (58.9%) had been unemployed. The youngest two groups were less likely to have experienced unemployment than the older groups, they were also less likely to have had experience of employment.

Chart 9.3
Experience of unemployment. All sample: age groups



Though the majority of those who had been unemployed had experienced this only once (Table. 9.4) a significant number (39 students) had been unemployed on two or more occasions and a smaller number (3 students) over 7 times.

Table 9.4 Student experience of unemployment: all sample.

times unemployed	
once	52
2 to 4 times	36
5 to 7 times	3
not known	2
total	93

Duration of experience of unemployment showed a similar pattern (Table 9.5) with a larger number of students unemployed for short periods. A small number had experienced longer term unemployment of over 2 years. Findings for male and female students were similar.

Table 9.5 Student experience of unemployment: all sample duration.

duration of unemployment	
up to 6 months	48
7 to 12 months	32
13 months to 2 years	5
over 2 years	6
not known	2
total	93

Fragmentation of employment experience and difficulty in finding work is supported by findings for the number of students involved in Government Training Schemes. 22 students had experience of Youth Training and 28 of Employment Training prior to entry to university.

Forty three students, 46%, of those who had experienced unemployment, stated that this experience influenced their decision to enter higher education but 87 students (55% of those who been in full-time work) stated that their experience of employment had influenced their decision.

Focus groups

Among the schools sample there was evidence of fear of unemployment, including graduate unemployment but the main concern of the students was to enter a 'career' rather than a 'job' as a result of obtaining A-levels and a degree. The Access students, being older, had all had experience of work. Data on former occupations was not collected in a formal manner but emerged out of the interview, sometimes in response to a specific question. No information was forthcoming from 6 students but there was sufficient data to produce Table 9.6. The table lists the information provided by the students which sometimes took the form of a job title, for example nurse, personal assistant, and sometimes a type of work, for example, repetitive work, office work.

Table 9.6

Student Characteristics: former occupation x Interview Group

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	total
care assistant	1			2	3
catering				1	1
engineering				2	2
housewife	1				1
housing manager	1				1
none	2	3	1		6
given					
nurse		1			1
nursing auxiliary				1	1
office		2	1		3
work					
part-time work			2		2
personal assistant			1		1
redundant			1		1
repetitive work		1			1
shop assistant	2			1	3
soldier	1	1		1	3
unemployed			2		2
works nights			1		1
total	8	8	9	8	33

The students had gained experience of a number of different occupations or of different jobs within the same occupational area. For example, one former soldier listed farm work, working as a bouncer, a lorry driver and 'quite a few other things', another listed various jobs associated with hotel work, another a range of different types of shop work and another a range of 'caring' occupations. This result implies that the occupations listed by respondents to the questionnaire may under-estimate the diversity of occupational experience within the sample.

A number of the Access students had continued to work either part-time or at night during their course. Two stated that they had been unemployed prior to the course and three others indicated in their responses that they had not been at work immediately prior to starting the course. Two students stated that redundancy had been influential in their decision to take the course and three had left work as a result of sickness or disability.

In accordance with the results from the questionnaire sample a number of the Access students expressed dissatisfaction with their former occupation. This disatisfaction had developed over time:

> "Well I wasted 14 years of my life in a dead end job."
> "I think, as well, you're sort of plodding along in your dead end job (office work) and it suddenly, it hits you. I think, you're sort of plodding along and you think is this all I'll be doing for the rest of my life? And inside you sort of half know that you are capable of something better."
> " Yes, I spent a long number of years doing .... er .... dull and boring repetitive work knowing I could do better."
> "We used to call ourselves .... when .... er .... we were student nurses, we used to go round with trolleys, we used to change bed pans and that. We used to call ourselves the ACME Shit Shovelling Company" ...."Not that I didn't .... I did, enjoy nursing but it wasn't what I wanted to do."
> "And then you sort of go along thinking, you know, I'll work in an office. Then years later you think, bloody hell, you know. I have got a brain, you know, it's in there somewhere."

Summary.

Taking the results from both the questionnaire and focus groups a number of factors associated with employment, unemployment and entry to university can be itemised:

- redundancy
- unemployment
- fear of unemployment
- the onset of disabling conditions
- fragmentation of employment in an unstable job market
- dissatisfaction with current employment

- the desire for a 'career' as opposed to a 'job'. This is supported in Chapters 13 and 14 in which results on expectations of university and aspirations beyond university are discussed.

The evidence suggests that unemployment, and fear of it, is one factor in encouraging mature students into higher education. Unemployment may, for example, impose change upon an individual, but there is also evidence that entry to higher education among adults is a proactive rather than a reactive process. Evidence from the data in this chapter combined with evidence on student social class, routes, qualifications and school leaving suggests that 'middle class' adults are more likely to recognise in education a means of career development and a means of dealing with perceived need for change as well as a means of responding positively to unemployment.

In terms of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) there is evidence of a relationship between social class, employment and education. For adults, further education (Chapter 7) is shown to be significant in providing the link between these components. The next chapter explores the influence of adult responsibilities on entry to higher education.

Chapter Ten. Adult responsibilities

This chapter draws together data from both elements of the study concerning the influence of adult responsibilities, in the form of families and children, on entrance to higher education.

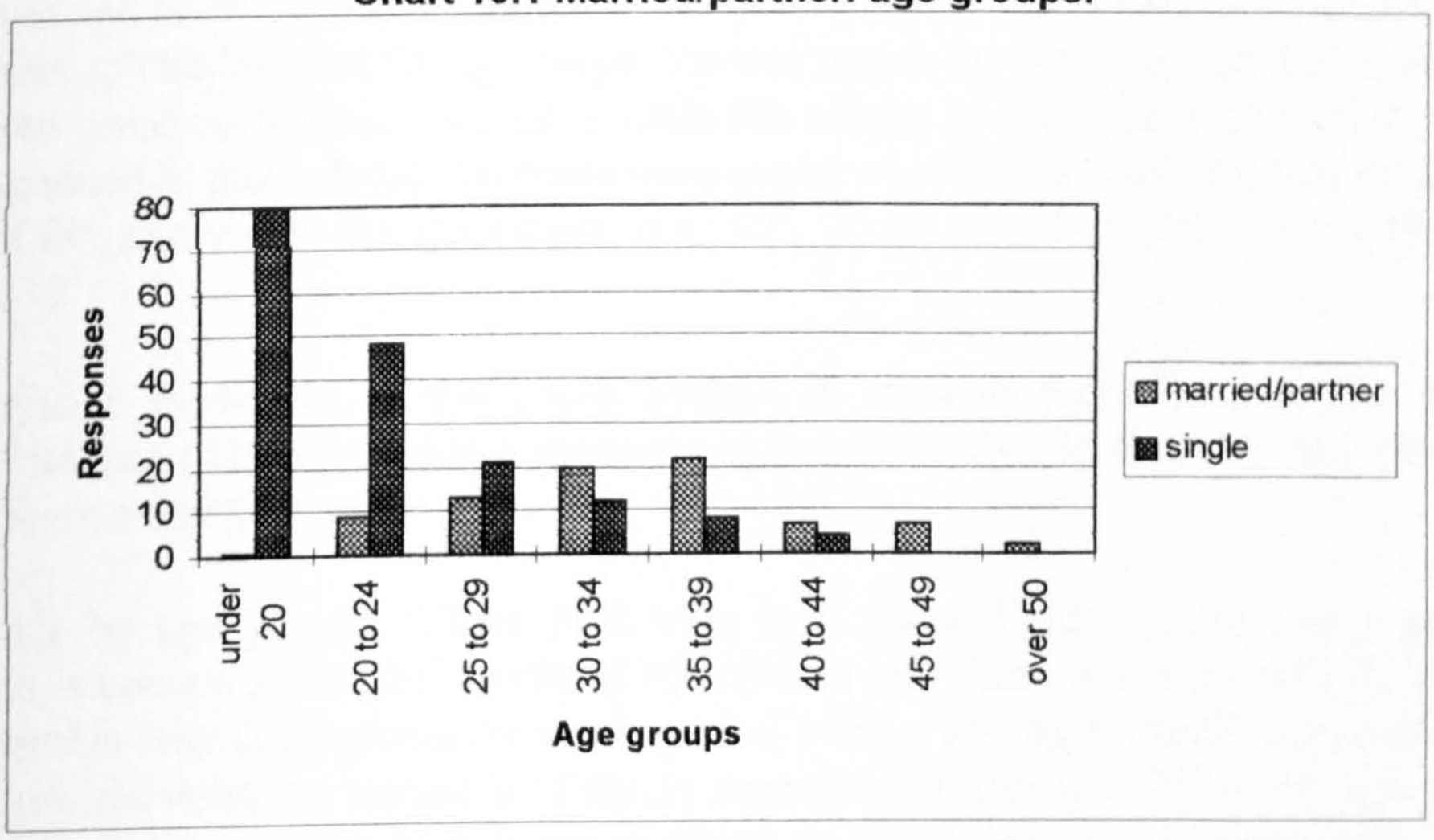
Taking qualitative data first, evidence on marital status (married, single, divorced, widowed etc.) was not sought in detail. It was considered that this approach, which might have been considered appropriate in the past, did not reflect the range of variations in partnerships applicable in current society. Also a detailed question in this area would have been unnecessarily intrusive within the aims of the study. Students were asked whether they were 'married or living with a partner", accepting their definition of their current status.

Table 10.1 Questionnaire sample. Partner/children. All Sample.

	raw data	per cent
married/living with a partner	81	32
children	78	31.07
single parent	18	7.2

The findings (Table 10.1) show that 81 (32%) of students in the sample were married or living with a partner and that most of these, 78, had children. There were 18 single parents(6.8% of the whole sample). Evidence of single parenthood was not sought directly but emerged from responses: those students who recorded that they had children but no partner.

Chart 10.1 Married/partner: age groups.



Analysis by age groups (Chart 10.1) showed that the sample remained predominantly single up to the age of 30. Only 1 student in the 'under 20' age group was married or living with a partner and only 9 in the '20 to 24' group. The "General Household Survey" (1992. p17. Table 2.4.) finds that of men aged between 16 and 24, 2 per cent

are married and 21 per cent are cohabiting while for women in the same age group the figures are 3 per cent and 34 per cent respectively. Given a total of 138 students under the age of 24 in the sample the figure married or living with a partner was 7.2 per cent. The sample is small but suggests that for those who see education as an extension of their educational career beyond school and for those entering higher education in their early twenties the development of marriage or partnership is delayed in favour of education. Alternatively, those who have entered into a relationship at this age are less likely to apply to enter higher education.

The figure was also low for the 25 to 29 age group, 13 students or 38.2 per cent of the sample. The change in the sample from predominantly "single" to predominantly "married/living with a partner" occurred around the age of 30 which implies that those, perhaps up to the age of 30, who have family commitments are less likely to return to education.

The sample was therefore largely comprised(68%) of single people under the age of 30. There were in total 152 students who listed no family commitments, partner or children, all of whom were under the age of 35.

Children.

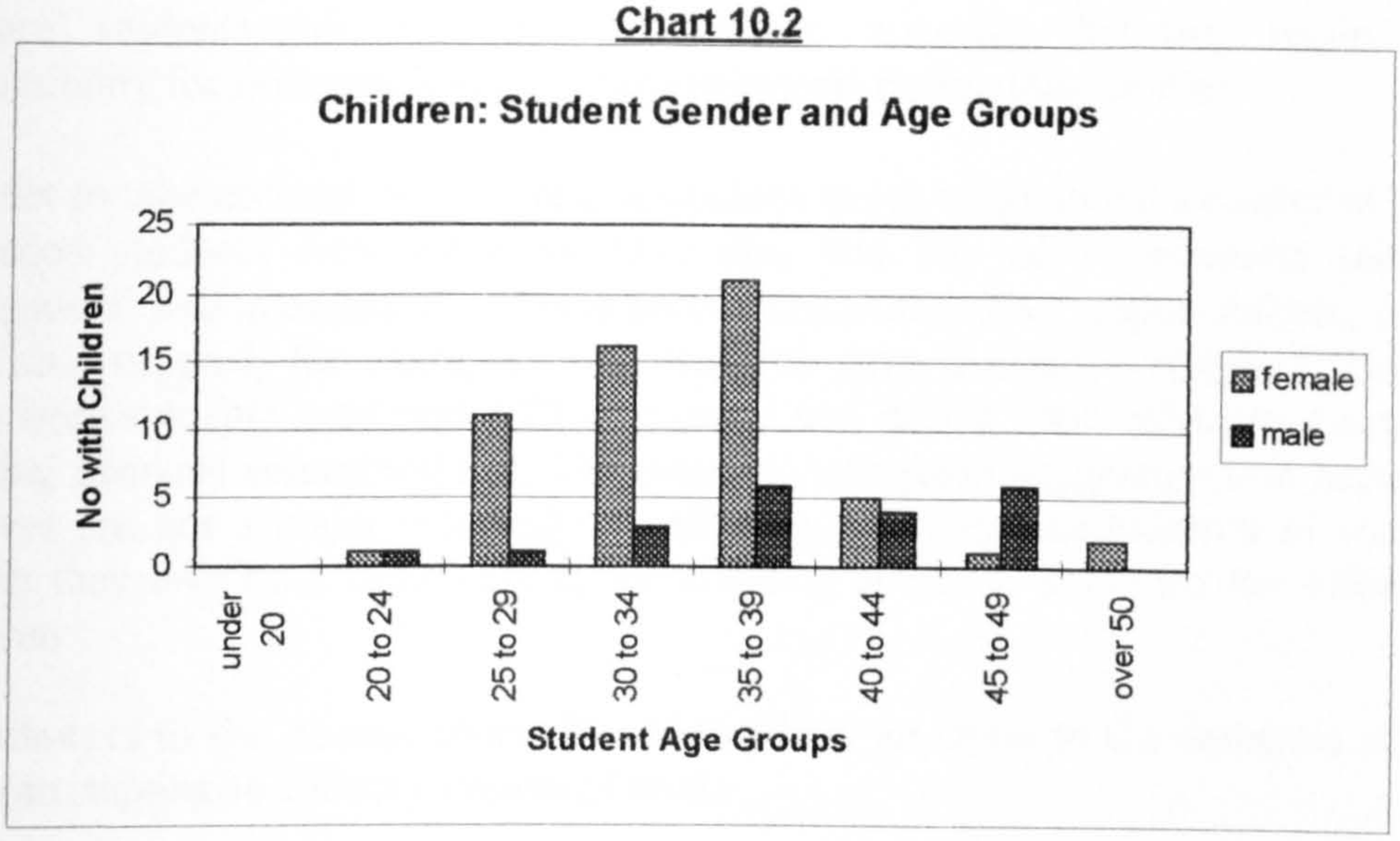
The need to provide care and financial support for children is likely to affect the opportunity for adults to return to education. Loss of earnings while attending university full-time and the need to provide substitute care for children can both incur additional financial demands. The decision of parents to return to education, assuming that unlimited finance is not available, will therefore be influenced by the number of children and their ages. In formulating the questionnaire it was decided not to ask for numbers of children but for age range. By this means an indication of the number of children involved becomes available while the effects of the ages of the children can be examined in more detail. Students were asked whether they had children under the age of five and within the age ranges '6 to 10', '11 to 13', '14 to 16', '17 to 18', and 'over 18'.

The results show that of the whole sample 78 students recorded that they had a child/children (31%) and that a greater percentage of female students had children, 43% female and 29% male.

Analysis by age groups (Chart 10.2 over leaf) showed that of the two youngest groups, students 'under 20' recorded no children and those under 24 only 2. This is comparable with the findings for marriage and partner and supports the argument that these groups delay the demands of family commitment. For the '25 to 29' age group the number of students with children increases to 12 and includes a significantly larger number of women but remains a relatively small proportion (21%) of the age group. Beyond the age of 25 the proportion of students in each age group who have children increases markedly however to 60% and rises to 75% for the 35 to 39 age group.

This finding again adds support to the significance of the age of about 30 in the return of "mature" students with family commitments to higher education.

Chart 10.2



As stated earlier, data on numbers of children was not collected directly but information on the ages of children (Table 10.2) provides an indication of the numbers involved. The evidence is sufficient to provide a picture of families rather than parents with one child, indicating that mature students have significant responsibilities in addition to their university studies.

Table 10.2 Number of children: all sample.

number of children	female students	male students	total
at least 1 child	31	14	45
at least 2 children	21	6	27
at least 3 children	5	0	5
at least 4 children	0	1	1
total	57	21	78

The pattern of ages of children (Table 10.3) indicates largely young families with children under the age of 13.

Table 10.3 Children: age groups.

children: age groups	female students	male students	total
under 5	23	6	29
6 to 10	33	9	42
11 to 13	17	5	22
14 to 16	9	3	12
17 to 18	1	1	2
over 18	6	6	12
total	89	30	119

There is some indication that parents wait until their children are over school age before returning to education but 29 students, 37% of those who have children, have children under 5. This adds support to the significance of family commitments for 'mature' students and particularly for women, assuming that they retain major responsibility for domestic and family commitments during their studies.

In order to take account of other responsibilities which might influence entry to higher education students were asked whether they had any adult dependent relatives. 'Dependent' was intended to embrace both financial and other responsibilities, care or emotional support, for example. Nine students gave a positive response Three of these were students aged under 20 who could not, during their university course, be carrying financial responsibilities. The response was small suggesting that dependent relatives are not a major responsibility affecting study for the majority of students, though they may be a significant factor affecting ability to study for the individuals involved.

Contributors to the Access course interviews drew attention to the demands of adult life in attempting to follow a course of study.

> Interview A
> "…. you've got to reorganise your whole life."
> If you've got children you've got to organise your time around the children and you've got to sort of ….erm …."
> "That's the most difficult thing I've got to do. You've got to clean for them, do all the housework as well as this (course work). That's the most difficult time, the holidays."
> "I don't do anything at home apart form college work, I have to say. I don't do any housework. The worst time is school holidays because I've got the children round me …. erm …. I have to direct them. I mean they have to stay out of my way because I have found it addictive."
> All four of these responses were from single parents.
>
> Interview C.
> "Coping with a two and a half year old, a lively two and a half year old."

Summary.

The results suggest that study, particularly full-time, does not combine well with the responsibilities associated with commitment to a partner and children, and even less well with children and no partner. It may be that awareness of this discourages those wishing to enter higher education from involvement in family responsibilities and discourages those who have such responsibilities from applying. More so in the case of women.

Pascal and Cox (1993 p.61) are cited in Chapter 2 (p.36) of this study. They suggest that though respondents to their study were able to point to decisive factors, for example, marriage breakdown, age of children in starting school or playgroup, economic factors as well as factors associated with work, as influencing entry to higher education, these formed an "intricate web" of elements. Results considered to date support the Pascal and Cox (1993) findings. Seen in terms of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) the interaction between employment and unemployment, family commitments and education form the 'web' found by Pascal and Cox (1993). Elements of the model components are drawn together at a point in time at which entry to higher education becomes a possibility. For mature students with family commitments there is evidence that the age of about thirty is significant perhaps at the time when the age of children and financial commitments are such as to make significant change a possibility. This does not imply a 'stage' in adult development (Chapter 2 p.19). The evidence on education routes (Chapter 7) and on employment in the last chapter implies diversity in life cycle patterns, and the 're-current' use of education to meet perceived need in the manner suggested by Tennant (1988 p.125 cited this study Chapter 2 p.20).

Making change involves knowledge, or the means to obtaining knowledge, of the alternatives on offer. The next chapter explores the sources of information, guidance and advice sought by students in both the questionnaire and focus group samples.

Chapter Eleven. Advice, guidance and information.

This chapter is concerned with the sources formal and informal from which the students, in both the questionnaire sample and the focus group interviews, sought information and advice and which influenced their decision to enter higher education. Questionnaire results are presented first and then these are compared with findings from the focus group interviews.

Sources of information advice and guidance. Formal sources.

Responses for the whole questionnaire sample (Table 11.1) show that students used combinations of sources of advice, guidance and information and that educational professionals, college lecturers, teachers and careers officers, were most significant among these. However 42 students, 16.7% of the sample, either sought no advice or found none that they had considered to be of any value.

Table 11.1 Professional Sources of Advice and Guidance. All sample. Responses in descending order.

Sources	Responses.
College Lecturers	71
teachers	67
careers officers	66
did not seek any advice	29
staff at advice shop (this university)	26
staff at an education advice centre	16
no advice of any value	13
staff at another university	12
staff at a training organisation	5
staff at a job centre	4

Analysis by age groups (Table 11.2) shows significant variation. Younger students, as would be anticipated, account for almost all of the responses for teachers and careers officers.

Table 11.2 Advice and guidance: professional sources: All sample x age groups.

	under 20	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	over 50
teachers	46	15	4	2	0	0	0	0
careers guidance at school	38	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
college lecturers	26	17	12	7	8	1	0	0
careers officers	35	17	8	2	1	2	1	0
staff at an education advice centre	2	4	3	2	4	0	1	0
no advice of any value	2	4	1	1	2	3	0	0
staff at advice shop	3	5	6	4	6	1	0	1
staff at advice centre	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0
staff at another university	2	5	3	2	0	0	0	0
staff at a training organisation	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	1
staff at a job centre	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
did not seek any advice	1	8	4	7	5	2	1	1

Analysis by education routes (Table 11.3), as would be expected, follows the pattern for age. For routes A, B, C, and J, younger students who entered directly from school or from FE, college lecturers, teachers and careers officers are of primary significance though a small number of students made use of other sources. Access students, route D, used mainly college lecturers and careers guidance available in the colleges together with the university advice shop. Students entering via route G had already been in the higher education system and made use of education sources as did students who followed route H. Route E students were less likely than any of the others to have sought advice (19% of the sample) and more likely to have been dissatisfied with the advice they obtained (9.5% of the sample). Those entering via a vocational route, route F, used a range of alternatives and 4 of them, of a sample of 15, sought no advice.

Table 11.3 Professional Advice, Education Routes,

	A	B	C	J	D	E	F	G	H
teachers	25	7	11	7	3	6	2	3	3
careers guidance at school	21	7	7	5	0	0	0	4	1
college lecturers	0	20	10	1	23	10	1	6	0
careers officers	16	15	7	3	6	10	2	6	1
staff at an education advice centre	1	2	0	0	3	5	0	1	2
no advice of any value	0	2	0	1	2	6	0	2	0
staff at advice shop	2	0	1	1	7	8	3	1	3
staff at advice centre	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0
staff at another university	2	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	0
staff at a training organisation	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	0
staff at a job centre	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
did not seek any advice	1	0	0	0	5	12	4	3	3

The other alternatives listed by students (Table 11.4 p.155) largely pre-empted sources of advice considered in subsequent questions; family and friends, the university prospectus, the 'clearing' system and informal contacts with teachers. Three students took a very personal perspective; their "own decision", "personal reasons" and "God". Sources of written or media influences were not considered in the formulation of the questionnaire but only one example is given by one student. The students did not list any sources of professional advice additional to those listed in the questionnaire item.

Educational personnel and institutions were the primary source of advice and information used by the students; advice centres drew a number of responses but were less significant than the institutions themselves. Sources outside the education system were little used; only 4 students obtained information from a job centre and 5 from a training organisation.

The pattern of findings reflects the degree of 'institutionalisation' of the routes. This, the third application of the term routes in the study (in addition to 'biographical' and 'statistical applications: see Chapter 7 p.96) refers to the extent to which processes and procedures were in place, both in the education system and outside, to support applicants to higher education via a designated route. Routes

A, B, C and J are highly institutionalised in that careers officers and teachers are available to provide information and advice and systems are available to process applications and offer information on finance, grants etc. There is in effect an institutionalised process for dealing with young applicants. The results show that younger students had a wider range of professional support readily available to them made more use of it and were more likely to find it of value than the older students. However, there is some evidence of dissatisfaction among younger students in the questionnaire sample and this is borne out in the sixth form focus group interviews:

> "We had a careers interview said we wanted to do A-levels and that was it."
> "There was some information. I didn't, but some people may have looked through it."
> "For me it (the careers interview) was more to gather information than to help with my decision."

One student found the information useful but a number had already arrived at the decision to apply for university prior to the interview.

The students also expressed dissatisfaction with the UCAS system. UCAS forms arose during discussion in three interviews. All of the students found the forms complicated, some more so than others, and a number expressed difficulty with the 'personal statement' section. They all received help and support from the teaching staff who assisted with personal statements and forms were checked by staff before they were submitted. One group suggested that they needed more help. One student concluded that "I think we need someone specialised." and, during the interview, the group devised a specialist service to be provided by UCAS to offer a "step by step" approach to completing the forms for organised groups of sixth formers from the schools in their area.

> Interviewer. "What did you think of the UCAS forms?"
> "Complicated."
> Laughter.
> Interviewer. "Did you manage to complete them on your own."
> All talking together. Laughter.
> "No, not really. We do them then we hand them in." (to be checked by staff)
> Interviewer. "Which were the complicated bits?"
> "Personal statements."
> "And the university codes and things."

Some of the students thought that there was insufficient help despite the best efforts of teachers and Careers staff.

> "I just didn't have a clue."

> "I wasn't helped. I mean I wasn't helped with what choices I had to make for unis. I was really struggling because I don't know anything about unis at all. I've only ever been to one of them."
> "I mean we've got ..... she's the Careers Adviser but she's only one person, there's like hundreds of us and she can't see us all." .... "She's really busy." .... "Mrs .... tries to help as well. She's our English teacher, she's really good but again, there's too many of us for one teacher."

The students also offered a number of contributions on university prospectuses, many critical:

- too big, 'thick', and unreadable, unmanageable
- too concerned with advertising, 'selling' the university, 'pretty pictures', 'glossy photos', attracting students
- can be misleading
- lacking in 'hard details' about courses, such as the number of points required for entry
- it was possible to find the required information with an effort
- one of the students thought they were ' all right'

> Interviewer. "Where else did you get information on universities from?"
> "Prospectus"
> Interviewer "What did you think university prospectuses were like?"
> "Pretty pictures"
> Laughter.
> "Glossy photos."
> "To try to get you to go there."
> "To sell themselves."
> "They are just out to sell themselves, basically."
> "None of them gave the points they wanted."
> "They were too keen on telling you how good the university was. They didn't give you hard details about the course really."
> "They were, sort of, too much on the advertising side of it. Telling you about the university rather than giving you the information."
> "I couldn't read them all they were so thick"." .... after you've been through six lots."
> "There's too much information, not what you want. They are about this thick some of them and you just don't want to read it all."
> "They (prospectuses) haven't got reality. I mean I went to, I've looked at , can I mention the university? .... and the prospectus was lovely, and I went there and it was a complete dive. (Laughter from other members of the group) .... It was horrible, it really was. And this had got pictures of old traditional buildings on the front and it was just horrible."
> "I found them OK".

In the perception of the students there seemed to be a disparity between their requirements and the functions of the prospectus from the point of view of the universities. Student concern was to find out quickly and easily whether the course

they wanted was on offer, what it was about and what they needed to get on to it. The characteristics and general quality of the institution was a secondary factor. The universities, on the other hand wanted to market their institution, make it attractive to students, provide information on facilities and services, and offer course information, as a single package. Given the size of many institutions, the number of courses offered and their complexity the resultant prospectus appears to students to be unnecessarily complex and marketing based. Bearing in mind that students need to consider a number of institutions, it seems that consideration might be given to including a single format, clearly delineated guide to courses, including entry requirements, for applicants within the marketing format of the prospectus.

The findings on the information, advice and guidance available to younger prospective entrants to higher education support the results of Roberts and Higgens (1992 p.24) and their assertion that a 'client centred' approach to advice and guidance is needed for young people, co-ordinated and ongoing from the age of 14. The young people in the schools interviews in this study were well supported, later evidence (Chapter 12) will show, particularly by their parents. Not all potential applicants can expect to receive this degree of support and shortcomings in the institutionalised 'system' will militate against entry for these candidates. There is also evidence considered later, that 'informal' sources of advice, particularly parents, should be 'structured in' to an ongoing process of advice and guidance as suggested by Roberts and Higgens (1992 p.24).

Older students had fewer sources of information, advice and guidance available to them, tended to use a single source or none at all and were less likely to find any of value. For many older students, following routes which lack 'institutionalisation', particularly those with vocational qualifications or qualifications gained through a range of educational alternatives (routes E and F), who are attempting to gain access to the education system, sources of advice and guidance are problematic. Roberts and Higgens (1992 p.102 cited this study Chapter 2 p.39) found evidence of a lack of support for adults, though to a greater extent than in this study; 55% of the Roberts and Higgens sample of mature students had sought no advice.

There is evidence that support is available to Access students in the colleges but the processes, or lack of them, which facilitated their application to their college course is not included in the study. A number of the students in the Access focus groups expressed trepidation at the prospect of returning to education:

Interviewer. "Did you find it difficult to come here and say 'I'm interested in this course'?"
"I found it difficult to come."
"I found it difficult."

> "To come and see Jeanie (course tutor) in the first place about this course, that was a trial in itself. In the morning it was 'I'm not going to bother. I can't do this'."
> Laughter.

Not all of the students experienced these fears but the evidence suggests that the lack of 'institutionalised' procedures present problems for some prospective students.

Summary.

The results suggest that 'institutionalised' procedures are in place for younger applicants to higher education but that there are short comings in the systems. There is evidence of a need for a more structured approach to careers guidance at an earlier stage in the school career.

Lack of 'institutionalisation' of routes of entry to higher education for mature students suggests that for many their applications currently amount to a 'one off' in each particular case. Sources of advice and guidance are available but students may not be aware of their existence, they may not choose to use them or they may not find them to be accessible. The findings suggest that the need is not necessarily for more sources of advice for adults but for more effective co-ordination between those which are available, both within the education system and outside, and improved accessibility together with more effective marketing. The latter to increase awareness of what is available and the former to provide a means of directing applicants towards the most effective and efficient progression through the various sources available. Implementation of a more structured approach would require the raising of awareness of opportunities for adults in higher education both within the education system and outside, for example, at Job Centres, among training organisations and at social security offices, and significantly increased co-operation and co-ordination between the institutions involved. The results suggest that the current lack of 'institutionalisation' in routes for adults favours applicants from middle class backgrounds who possess the self confidence and expertise, and experience of the education system necessary to seek opportunities for themselves.

Table 11.4 Questionnaire sample. Other sources of professional advice and guidance listed by students.

Central TV. Action for jobs	1
family	1
friend	3
friend on course	1
friends/children's teachers	1
God	1
opted through clearing	1
my own decision	1
parents	2
personal reasons	1
prospectus	2
student services	1
teachers at a local school	1
total	17

Chapter Twelve.
Influences: advice, support and encouragement.

Question 4.2 (Appendix 2) of the questionnaire was concerned with the wider issue of the people who influenced the students' decision to enter higher education, who provided not only advice but also encouragement and support. The question was devised to explore perceived responses from others; positive, indifferent and negative. The intention was to further develop the findings on 'formal' sources as well as to introduce 'informal' sources. In this chapter the findings from the questionnaire are presented and compared with the results from the focus group interviews

Responses from the questionnaire sample are recorded in Table 12.1. Responses to the 'did not apply' alternative must be regarded with caution since students often ignored it. Non-responses are recorded as 'blanks' in the table. None-responses to a category may however be interpreted to suggest that it played little or no part in influencing respondent decision-making.

Table 12.1 Influences: advice, support and encouragement. All sample.

Categories	strong support	support	not interested	opposed	strongly opposed	did not apply	blanks	total
mother	133	63	13	3	2	14	23	251
father	115	55	16	2	1	27	35	251
other family members	67	78	23	1	0	23	59	251
spouse or partner	78	39	4	4	2	63	61	251
college teaching staff	57	58	6	2	0	57	71	251
friends	86	74	13	2	0	24	52	251
Careers officer	25	31	4	1	0	90	100	251
staff ed advice centre	12	9	4	0	0	117	109	251
Advice shop staff	8	11	4	0	0	112	116	251
staff another university	3	11	3	0	0	120	114	251
Job Centre staff	1	3	3	0	0	127	117	251
staff at Benefit Office	1	1	4	0	2	125	118	251
employer	11	14	3	3	1	107	112	251
co-worker	17	18	2	0	0	97	117	251
teacher at school	46	40	0	0	0	78	87	251
members religious faith	13	6	1	0	0	120	111	251
members local community	5	3	4	0	0	123	116	251

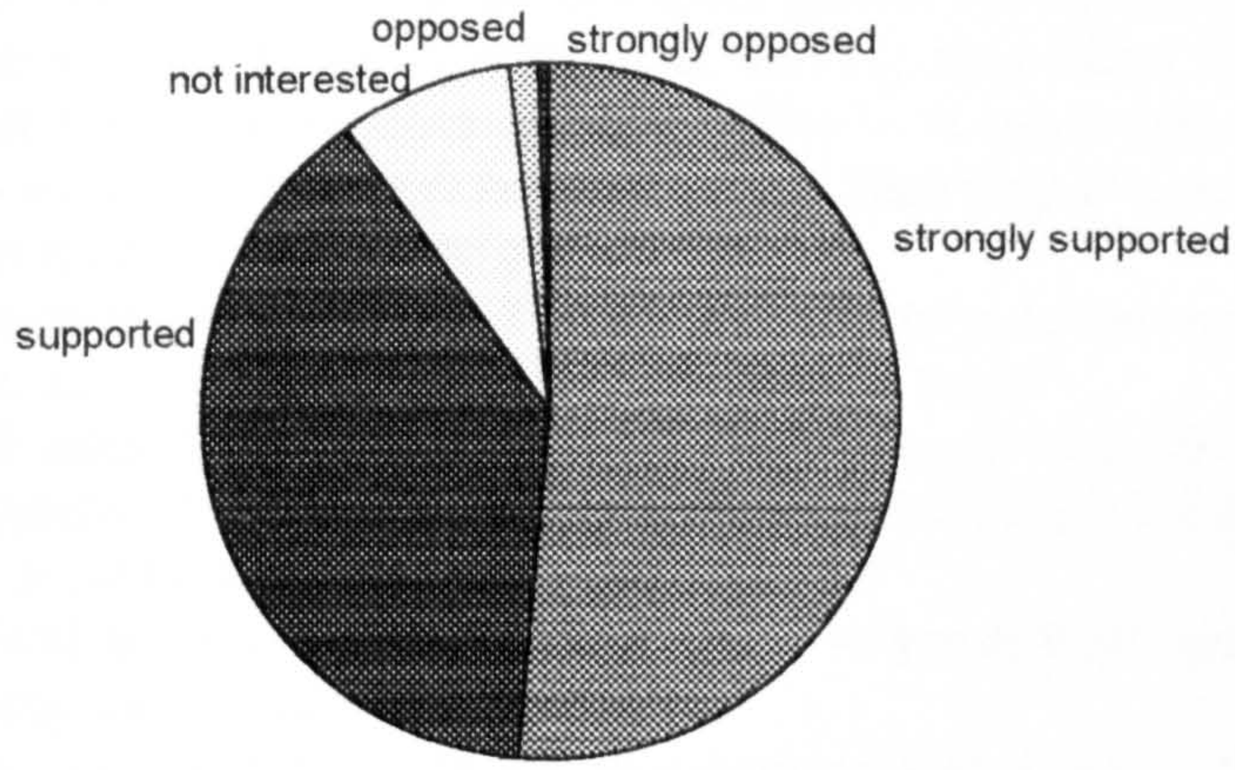
Two factors emerge from initial examination of the raw data (Table 12.1. and. Chart 12.1 over leaf): first that the students, as a whole sample, received more support than ambivalence or discouragement from others, and second that "informal" sources, for example, parents and family, were more significant than "formal" or "professional" sources.

With reference to the former, 678 responses stated "strong support" from one or more of the categories offered and another 514 recorded "support". Conversely 18

experiences of opposition were recorded and only 8 of "strong opposition". A further 108 responses indicated a lack of interest from one or more of the categories. Differences between formal and informal sources were very clear: support from parents, other family members, spouse or partner and friends all produced higher response rates than for teachers, college lecturers and institutions providing advice and guidance.

Chart 12.1

Support, advice and encouragement: all sample.



Routes into Higher Education: parents.

Analysis by routes, comparing number of responses with total questionnaire sample, shows that students following A, B, C, and J (those entering directly from school or FE (Appendix 9 Table 12.2-12.5) experienced the complete support of their mothers and near total support from fathers. No 'lack of interest' or negative responses are recorded for either parent. Responses for fathers include 'does not apply' or none-responses. Parental influence declined across age groups (Appendix 9. Tables 12.6-12.7) and routes (Appendix 9. Tables 12.2-12.5) but continued to be important up to the age of 40. Mothers were significant among 50% or more members of each group.

Comparison of questionnaire findings with the results of the focus group interviews shows unanimously positive responses of support from parents among the sixth formers. (The findings of the schools focus groups on influences are summarised in Tables 12.8 and 12.9 p.166). For the sixth formers their parents provided positive role models through their own former, or in one case current, experience (in some cases both parents, were former students in higher education, one father had "dropped out" and one mother was in university at the time of the interview) and they offered ongoing support and encouragement of various kinds:

> "My sister (currently a university student) refers to my dad as her bank manager ....(Laughter from the rest of the group) .... or as her taxi driver or road manager or something like that. I think that's how I see my parents."

Sometimes support was shown in the form of direct statements on student ability or educational future while in other cases students felt that it was 'accepted' or 'expected' that they would go into higher education. There was one instance in which a student suggested that there was parental pressure in the form of the financial outlay involved in his sixth form studies.

> "My parents thought I wasn't suited to it (both parents are teachers). My parents, after a while, I mean, the way I'm working, they said I wasn't doing enough work to be suited to university. They've changed their mind now."...."It is, it's taken for granted that I'd go. Then they told me I'm not suited for it but I've still got to go."
> "My parents sat me down and said it was a good idea to go to university."
> "I think in a way it was expected because my sister is there."
> "But on the other hand, probably you'll know because both of your parents are teachers (addressed to another member of the group) but to me its just been an automatic thing that I would go to uni'."
> "They (parents) are holding that over my head. I've got to work because they are paying out all this money for me."
> "It's just my mom and dad went and they both enjoyed it and ..... Yes. And I suppose they expected it of me but I wanted to go anyway."

Contributions from the Access students hark back to and provide support on the discussion of parental attitudes to school leaving (Chapter 8), both positive and negative responses were recorded. Students in Interviews 1 and 3 cited their parents as providing ongoing support but other students recorded overtly negative reactions towards enrolling for the Access course from parents:

> Access
> Interview C.
> "My mother thinks I'm totally round the bend. After being at home for 11 years with my husband supporting me it's about time I went out and got a job and helped put money in the house." (Elderly parents, the same student whose parents refused her the opportunity to stay on at school)
> Interview D "Get a job, get a real job." (response from parents)

The findings highlight the ongoing significance of parents in supporting the involvement of their offspring in education but other family members, and friends, were also found to be significant, more significant than formal sources, in both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Among the sixth formers there was some evidence of the involvement of family members outside the nuclear family though in only a few cases resulting probably from the dominance of the nuclear family as a the most pervasive social unit. Three of the responses were from Asian students for whom the extended family is perhaps more significant.

Interviewer. "Who else was involved apart from your parents?"
"My sisters and my cousins."
"My uncle."
"My cousins."
"When my cousin told me it was the best time he ever had."

A number of the sixth formers had siblings who were either in university at the time of the interview or were former students. These provided the students with positive role models, the encouragement of their positive experiences, the opportunity of prior experience of university life through, for example, visiting brothers and sisters and attending university functions, such as balls, together with practical help and support.

"My sister, she said how she enjoyed it. She really loved it and that's what's making me go to university."
"People around us. I've got a sister who is 7 years older than me. When I was 11, going into senior school she had already started at university. I went and stayed weekends with her and thought "Right, this is for me." ....
" So you know that was encouragement. She's always encouraged me to stay on."
"My brother has really helped me most. My mum and dad they both left school at 16, so really they, they couldn't help. But my mom she works at he university so she's got more idea. But my brother mainly, my brother helped me."
"My sister goes to Birmingham and I went with her to the first year ball and it was brilliant. The social life there is just .... you know and it's important as well as the academic."

'Sibling rivalry' also played a part in some cases:

Group C.
"When my brother was doing his A-levels I was the kind of work that he had to do and I thought that looks reasonably easy. I could do that."
Laughter.
"Well, I didn't think it was easy but I thought if he can do it why can't I?"
Interviewer. "OK. Anybody else? Brothers and sisters that they've sort of competed with you if you like?"
"My sister."
"Yes, I do."
Interviewer. "Because your sister or your brother went you thought because they're going I'm going?"
"No, not like that. Erm .... I was trying to get better than her." Laughter.
"It's like she's doing teaching so everyone in my family wanted me to do teaching, so I wanted to do what I wanted to do. So they didn't think I could do A-levels so I wanted to do it to peeve them, you know what I mean?"

Spouse/partner.

There is an anomaly in the questionnaire findings with regard to spouse or partner among the questionnaire sample. Students who followed routes A, B and C list no spouse or partner in section 1 of the questionnaire but include these as influential in response to this question. It is assumed that a 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' is perceived as a 'significant other' by some of the students though they did not live with them.

Among the questionnaire sample (Appendix 9. Tables 12.6, 12.7) the influences of spouse/partner increases with age but does not become more important than mothers until the age of about 30. This corresponds with the findings on family commitments; students over the age of 30 are more likely to have partners and families and therefore may perceive themselves as belonging to a unit separate from their parents.

Contributions from the Access students reflect responses from the questionnaire sample to some extent but were not always positive:

> Access group interviews
> Interview A.
> "My husband thinks he supports me."
> "Exactly the same as my situation really. It's like my husband. He looks at me and thinks, Oh just put it down, you'll get it done, as if it's not important but it's important to me. I think you've got to make them realise that as well."
> "I think one of my problems is being married to a man .....Laughter." ..... who .... er .... who over the years had to sort of .... to change from sort of being the person who gets on with relaxing when he comes in from work, whereas he's had to cope with things that I would have been doing before, like the three children and helping with tasks at home."
> "Exactly the same situation. My husband cooks now."
> "My wife pushed me .... I think she was fed up of hoovering round my feet."
> "My husband is very supportive of me at the moment because three years ago he did his degree."

Partners are perceived by the students to vary in the degree and type of support provided and in the extent to which they are able, and prepared, to change in accordance with changing circumstances.

Friends were positive influences among the questionnaire sample a finding which is also supported by the results from the group interviews. Both the sixth form and Access groups cited friends among the informal sources of influence but not as of primary significance. The Access groups recognised the support of other students within the course but the sixth formers were ambivalent about other students:

Sixth form focus groups.
Interviewer. "To your friends. Do you sort of, among yourselves, encourage one another to go to university do you think?"
"Yes we do."
"Everybody has said they are going to university so ...."
Interviewer. "Do you think, on a number of occasions now you have said 'All of us are this, all of us are that'. Are you aware of yourselves as a collective like that?"
"No."
Interviewer. "I mean do you support one another in the work that you do?"
"Yes, we do help one another out don't we? Lend us your work."
Laughter.
Interviewer. "I wasn't thinking of anything as obvious as that."
"You do don't you, help one another along?"
Interviewer. "So you discuss which universities you are going to go to and this sort of thing?"
A number of responses. Yes.
Interviewer. "Formally in classes or informally?"
A number of responses. Informally.

The sixth form students had become surrounded by others sharing the same aspirations among whom going to university was the norm, but they seemed ambivalent about the significance of relationships within the group. It may be that their responses were applied to the interview group, which, comprised of volunteers, was not a teaching group which met frequently. It may be that other social groups within the sixth form were more significant and therefore might have been expected to developed a higher degree of cohesion. The responses gathered from the sixth form interviews are paradoxical however given that in their expectations of university considered later (Chapter 13) the students emphasised the importance of "the social life", anticipated that they will be among a group of people who are "all in the same boat" and among whom they expect to form relationships which will last "for life".

The questionnaire results suggest that, whereas the influence of peer groups is recognised among younger students, it may have been under-estimated among mature students. People at work, employers and co-workers, have little positive significance apart from younger students most of whom were involved in part-time work or short term employment.

Formal sources.

As sources of influence, rather than advice and information, formal sources were less significant than informal in the questionnaire results. There is a second anomaly among students in the questionnaire sample who followed route A. These students did not list attendance at colleges of FE neither did they include college lecturers as sources of professional advice, but 19 of them included college

lectures as influential in response to this question. Two explanations suggest themselves; first that the students had informal contacts with college lecturers as, for example, family members or family friends, or the students attended colleges on link courses for a part of their A-level or other studies, or were members of an evening class. The eventuality of 'dual' attendance was not included in the questionnaire but one of the students in the group interviews provides an example of link course attendance and 3 students in the 'under 20' group in the questionnaire sample stated that they had attended evening classes.

The results on 'formal' influences from the focus groups reflect the findings from the questionnaire sample. The Access course students cited no 'formal' influences, though they recognised the individual support provided by teaching staff during their course. Teachers or "some of the teachers" are cited as influences by a number of the sixth form students in offering encouragement and in guiding and overseeing academic work but there is a generally ambivalent attitude to school and staff. Responses to direct questions on the influence of school suggested that it is perceived as secondary to the significance of home and family.

> Interviewer. "What about school? How influential has school been?"
> "Not very influential at all."
> "No. It's more home than school."
> "Yes. More from home."
> "Well (Mr and Mrs. staff names) tried to sell the school basically. Obviously the more sixth formers they have the more money they have but they did suggest, you know, in saying that, you know, if you get 4 GCSEs it would stand you in good stead to get A-levels - hint, hint."

Student perceptions of school and their study programmes were not overtly sought during the interviews. The aim was to avoid assessment of the approach of the school and to concentrate on student experience. Opportunities for students to offer contributions on their schools arose during the interviews but these were not taken up by the students. There was little overt criticism or praise for the schools. The students seemed to be accepting of the approach offered or unwilling to comment to an "outsider", probably identified with the staff, unless specifically asked to do so. Some of the students stated that they found the attitude of staff irksome. It may be that the students were not consciously aware of the continuous, diffused and generalised influence of teachers and school.

Disinterest. Routes into Higher Education.

Responses indicating lack of interest among others in student decisions to enter higher education were relatively infrequent among the questionnaire sample.. Analysis by education route (Appendix 9. Table 12.9) indicates that disinterest was more likely to be experienced among those following routes D and E and, also for these groups, was more likely to be found among family and friends, but

responses are small in number. However, route E also contains those who found it difficult to obtain information suggesting that entry via this route can be difficult.

Opposition.

The questionnaire sample provided little evidence of experience of opposition (Appendix 9 Tables 12.10-12.13) and there is insufficient evidence to suggest that any group or groups experienced this to any greater extent than any other.

Analysis by gender (Appendix 9 Table 12.14) found comparative experience of support between male and female. Findings for strong support correlate at 0.947 and for support at 0.89.

Instances of negative contributions or discouragement found among the sixth formers were minimal.

> Sixth form interviews.
> Interviewer. "Everybody has encouraged you. Nobody has said, you know, you don't want to do that. (go to university). Nobody at all?"
> "Only one. One of my mates. That's because he didn't want to go." .... "I think he would have preferred me to stay around like and get a job like he's done." .... "For himself. It was for his benefit."
> Interviewer. "Has anybody said to you don't want to do that?" (go to university)
> "Only people who have dropped out."
> "My uncle said to me. It's not so much going to university but about the course. He said that it's quite competitive (law) and that perhaps it would be wise to choose something that would not be as competitive and ...."
> Interviewer. "Because you are a girl?"
> "Yes."
> Laughter.
> "My parents have told me not to go but that's only because they don't want me to leave home not because they don't want me to get an education."
> Interviewer. "They've supported your education but they are not keen for you to go away from home. Do you think that's because you are a girl? Do you think it would be different if you were a lad?"
> "Definitely."
> "My parents just don't want me to go away. My dad doesn't want me to go at all I don't think." (again a female student)

The degree of support experienced by the Access students varied. Some stated that they received very little support..

> Interview A.
> Interviewer. "How then does this affect the other people in your lives? Where does your support come from?
> "Where does what come from?"

"I'm a single parent. I'm my own support really."
"So am I . In fact people around me, I think, have got a negative attitude to my education because they are frightened of where it's going to take me, because there has been such a change in the house, because I was very family centred before and now the children are right on the back boiler, my relationships are on the back boiler."
"Nobody supports me, they don't know what Access is."

Self.

The emphasis upon their own contribution to their current situation was found among the questionnaire sample and the sixth form and Access groups. A questionnaire item asked students to indicate any sources of advice guidance and encouragement other than those listed. The results (Appendix 9 12.15) constitute a short though varied list. Three of particular interest were "me", "myself" and "nobody". Sixth formers and Access students in group interviews were often anxious to emphasise that the decision to enter higher education was their own:

Sixth form interviews.
Interviewer. "Who said this (staying on and going to university) was a good idea for you?
"Yourself."
"Myself."
"I made my own mind up really."..... "That's what I wanted to do. When I told them (parents) I wanted to do it they encouraged me but it was me that ...."
"Everybody said I should but I knew that I wanted it anyway."
"I'd set my mind on something. I've been the same for that ever since really."
Interviewer. "You say your parents were involved in your making this decision but you don't .... you feel that you made the decision do you, or do you think you were just encouraged?"
"They gave advice but I feel that it was my decision in the end. They were there but at the end it was all up to me, I think. They said so...."
"Yes. It was my decision."
"I wouldn't let them decide though. I mean if they said do this do that I'd think about it but if at the end of the day it wasn't what I wanted I wouldn't do it because my parents said so."

Access interviews.
Interviewer. "Can I just ask you one more thing. You made a decision. Can I just ask you who was involved in that decision, you know, to come on this course.
Who made it?"
"I did."
"I did."
"Me."
General positive response from the whole group.

The sixth formers, and some members of the Access groups recognised the influences of others but did not seem to see this as detracting from their own efforts. Other Access course students perceived themselves as achieving against odds rather than with support. They had needed to convince others who did not understand of the validity of what they were trying to do and to change others in accordance with their aims. Responses from some of these students were aggressive, almost arrogant. They seemed to feel the need to express their success as their own achievement, that they had taken control and made a choice. Perhaps their responses were made in recognition of their new found independence and that they had achieved in circumstances that they found very difficult. Students who responded in this way constituted a small number of the sample as a whole. Perhaps they are more representative of those who would wish to enter higher education but for whom the perceived odds against them make it unlikely that they will do so.

Summary.

The results, of both the questionnaire and focus groups, suggest that respondents perceive a difference between the 'formal' sources of influence listed and the 'informal'. The former provide mainly specialist services and information while support is drawn largely from the latter. Among 'informal' sources family and parents are shown to be most significant. The influence of parents particularly so, not only among the younger students but extending into adult life.

In terms of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) the evidence shows a strong interaction between education and social milieu, the latter including a community of friends. With reference to the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) the significance of the interaction between small-scale interaction and human agency is highlighted. The study results, as considered thus far suggest interaction between three components of the model as significant: among student characteristics, social class, among prior experiences, social milieu, particularly family and parents, interacting with educational experiences to influence the probability of educational success and entry to higher education. Interaction between these components of the model is discussed in more detail in Chapter 15.

The next two chapters explore the influence of student expectations of the university experience and its anticipated outcomes on entry to higher education.

Table 12.8 Influences 1. Sixth Form Students

friends	extended family	siblings	parents
Friends	You saw people in your family and that	sister in university	What mother wanted me to do
Do you encourage one another?	My cousins	sister graduated last year	It's got a lot to do with your family
Yes we do. Everyone is going to university so	My uncle	sister in second year at Birmingham	Parents
Interview 1.	Cousin told me it was the best time he ever had	Influenced by sisters enjoyment of university	My mom and dad
Talk about, expect to happen?		Brother did A-levels, I could do that	Parents expected it of me
Yes		visits to siblings in university and attendance at university social functions.	My parents sat me down and said it would be a good idea
Yes		sibling rivalry	Ongoing parental encouragement
			It's always been taken for granted that I would go.
			Mum and dad enjoyed university
			My mom's there now
			Question. Were parents involved in influencing entry to university?
			A number of responses. Yes
Negative.	**Negative**		**Negative**
Friend did not want student to stay on go to university, job same as him, for his benefit.	Uncle: law not suitable for a girl		Parents don't want me to leave home
			Medicine unsuitable for a girl
			Interview 3.

Table 12.8 Influences 2. Sixth Form Students.

Careers service/officers	school/teachers	self
We had a careers interview, said we wanted to do A-levels and that would be it.	Parents talked about it not teachers	Yourself
There was some information, I didn't but some people may have looked through it.	*Not teachers but parents?*	No one
Decided before that (the careers interview) was it?	A number of responses. Yes.	I made my own mind up really
A number of responses. Yes	Teachers	That's (staying on at school and university) what I wanted to do, they (parents) encouraged me but it was me that ....
For me it was more to gather information than to help with my decision.	They check on us and they encourage us a lot and it really makes you work	I wouldn't let them decide though, I wouldn't do it because my parents said so
Really useful (information)	Well (teacher's names) tried to sell the school, more 6th formers, more money, hinted if you get more than 4 GCSEs should do A-level.	I set my mind on doing something, I've been the same ever since
	Examination results: GCSE, mock A-levels.	They (parents) gave advice but I feel it was my decision in the end

Chapter Thirteen.
Expectations of university: what will university be like?

This chapter sets out and compares the findings on student expectations of university from the schools and Access focus groups, though data on finance is drawn also from the questionnaire results. Expectations of the higher education experience is explored as an influence on applicants.

What will university be like?

Anxieties.

Perhaps the most extreme student view of the introduction to university life was expressed by an Access student:

> "Chaos, pure chaos ....You've got God knows how many students. You've got something like 3 or 4 hundred people in a lecture room. In the first year you won't know anyone .... (inaudible)....and you won't have time to .... if you get through the first year .... there will be people dropping out."

The quotation embodies anxieties shared by both the schools and Access groups. Both groups expressed concerns about large classes, the size and complexity of the buildings and the anonymity associated with a large organisation. Some students expressed concern that the individual attention available to them from staff in their current situation would cease to be available in higher education. The sixth formers who were intending to leave home anticipated an initial period of "homesickness" and loneliness but they did not expect that this would last.

Though these anxieties were experienced by the students as significant they may be seen to be 'normal', the expected insecurities associated with significant change and being overawed by the prospect of entrance to an unfamiliar, large, seemingly complex institution. Some of the students were aware that universities had developed methods of overcoming these problems in their admissions procedures, 'freshers' programmes and tutorial systems.

Personal Finance.

Questionnaire sample.

Section 5 of the questionnaire collected data on finance with reference to:

- the sources of funding used by students for their education immediately prior to entering their current course and for their current course;
- the extent to which they had experienced difficulty in obtaining funding for both of these; and
- student current and anticipated problems with finance.

The results, which are set out in detail in Appendix 10, are summarised here. Students in the sample produced 'packages' of funding from various sources dependent upon individual circumstances. Funding from 'public sources', in particular the local authority, was significant, though university students had clearly been removed form the benefits system. Families, spouses and parents, were significant sources of financial support.

The majority of the students had no difficulty or little difficulty in obtaining funding but with current course easier to fund than past education. A significant minority, some 8% to 10% of the sample experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining funding. It is not possible from the study findings to determine the characteristics of this group. There is some indication of an age variation and some indication that women find it more difficult than men to obtain finance but there is insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions. It may be that the funding procedures currently in place discriminate against a particular category of applicants not isolated in the study results. It may be that there is no pattern but that funding varies dependent upon the financial circumstances of particular individuals at a particular point in time.

The results suggest that funding was more difficult to obtain for education prior to entry to university than for the current course. This suggests that procedures for obtaining funding for continuing education are inefficient or that funding is inadequate. It also implies that some students find it necessary to 'shop around' and negotiate in order to obtain funding. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that finance continues to be a barrier in access to post-school education, an element which might discourage or preclude access to some prospective students. The lack of representation of social classes IV and V in the higher education population supports this.

It is possible to generalise from the results that though finance might be available it is often insufficient. Some 50% of the questionnaire sample stated that they would find it 'hard' to complete their current course without additional funding. An additional group stated that they could cope with the funding available but would like part-time work to increase their income. Some 30% anticipated 'no problem' with funding.

Overall the questionnaire results imply that the system for allocating funding for students in post school education, including higher education, is inefficient and the resources allocated for this purpose are inadequate. Results form the questionnaire are supported by the findings from the focus group interviews.

Students in all four sixth form groups saw finance as a major problem:

> Interview A.
> Interviewer. "What sort of things are you going to have to think about (in university)?"

"Money."
Interview B.
Interviewer. "Is anything about university going to be a problem?"
"Money."
Interview C.
Interviewer. "Is there anything you see about university as a problem?"
"Money."
Interview D
Interviewer. "Is there anything you are not looking forward to (about university)?"
"Being really poor and starving to death."

The students recognised that they would need finance for food, books, equipment, travel, accommodation and their social life and were aware of potential sources, parents, grants, loans, part-time work and sponsorship, but apart from this general understanding had no knowledge of how the system operated or the costs involved. For example, most of the courses for which the students were making application would probably not draw sponsorship as the current system operated but none had explored this option. One young man who expressed an intention to make a career in the RAF had not explored the possibility of sponsorship and thought that it was probably 'too late now'. The students seemed uncertain about the difference between grants and loans. There was an indication that grants were dependent upon parental income and expenditure but no one seemed to know what the grant could amount to, only that it was not enough. One student thought that loans increased annually, another estimated the cost of living in halls at 40 pounds a month while a third quoted the case of a student who left university with a loan debt of 10,000 pounds, all of which are indicative of the generalised lack of knowledge of the financial demands involved.

Parents were seen to be the primary source of funding.

"Yes its their role.(to provide finance) I mean I know that sounds really trite but it is. That's their role as parents."
"You have to rely on your mom and dad for that sort of thing."
"We haven't talked about it. It was done for my sister so I assumed it would be done for me."
Interviewer. "Where will the money come from?"
"Parents." (Laughter)

A number of the students stated that they had already discussed finance with their parents in an informal manner but not all of them were guaranteed parental financial support.

Interviewer. "How significant are parents in this (finance)?
"For me very because I don't think they will be able to give me very much at all."
"As much as they can but I come from a working class home."

> "I don't think I'm going to get a lot because my sister's already at university and so paying for two people you know ...."
> "I don't know that I am going to be able to afford it."

It seems that the sixth form students approached entry to university as a staged process. At the time of the interview they were at the stage of preparing applications, consideration of finance would come at a later stage when most of them could expect to rely on parental support. They had gained the impression that they would be 'poor' or lacking in finance but had little idea of quite what that meant, apart from a small number of students who anticipated real problems for their families. The recognition among students who intended to stay at home during university that this presented a cheaper option also suggests that their decision might, at least in part, be based on financial considerations.

Personal finance was raised as an issue in two Access groups. In Interview A it was raised by the interviewer towards the end of the session and in Group C it was raised by one of the students but not pursued by the rest of the group. Though it was not specified in the interview content it was anticipated that personal finance would arise as a major issue.

Contributions from Access Interview A indicated that finance is a problem for many students while on the Access course and that students anticipate that it will continue to be a problem during their university studies. The students expressed three interrelated problems:

- the amount of money available to them
- the loss of earnings as a result of full-time education
- difficulties in gaining access to funding.

> "When you are living on income support and you're living on a tight bone, you are living as tight as you can, the prospect of living like this for a period of time is fairly terrible. That's the thing that like for me is the most daunting thing." ...."All through this course I have been at points when I can't afford to come any more because of money. (formerly in full-time employment) If you have worked and earned a wage and you've been living fairly comfortably, not rich, but you know, you've had money in your pocket and then coming here and having to live on the dole or whatever and going to university and living off the a grant they give you ....."
> "I don't think it's to do with comfortable living. Before I came here I was divorced and living on income support but I had the means of making money through the 'black economy' in just little ways, like, I'm being honest, like looking after children after school and just being available for this and for that. And that little bit of extra money made the difference to my life style. Whereas now I have to pay for books that I can't afford, have to pay for travel because I don't live far enough away to get a grant, you know, money. Stupid as it seems the meals that I have here, you

know, you can't waste an hour, cost me. It's costing me to come here. I can't afford it and I can never justify it."

When asked, "If you could make a change that would benefit Access students what would it be?" students in Interview A replied:

"To make it less difficult to get money."
"To make it easier."
"To make it less difficult in that you haven't got to go and sort of apply for money which I won't do, can't do. You know it should be more readily available."
"Being dragged on these 'Restart' interviews when you know where you are going and they still seem to pull you along and say we can help you get this job."
"The Restart, I've noticed that .... I don't have to go to Restart, I'm a single parent. A lot of friends have to come out of lessons and go to Restart interviews when they've got their aims set on university and they still have to go the Restart and say yes we are available for work. You know every time you go you declare that you're available for work and you're not."

The results from both the questionnaire and the focus groups demonstrate that finance is a problem for some groups of students but it is not possible to draw conclusions on which categories of students are most affected. The results therefore do not contribute, except in general terms, to the influence of finance on interaction between the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) components.

People in university: students.

The two groups expressed similar expectations of what university students would be like. The sixth formers expected that other students would be like themselves

"The people will be like people at school. It's not going to make any difference."

Differences were expected mainly on the basis of regional variations in attitudes and home background, and, though there would be people they didn't like, this was not seen as a major problem. The sixth formers saw the main problem to be making friends among people very like themselves.

The Access students also expected other university students to be like the sixth formers, that is, very different from themselves.

Interview A.
"I feel a bit daunted by the prospect of a room full of 18 year olds."
Interview B
"Full of people wearing funny clothes."

Interview C
"Mostly younger." (2 responses)
"18 year old know-it-alls."

Only one Access student and one sixth former recognised the possibility of finding mature students in university.

The expectation among the Access students that they would meet people different from themselves in university carried a historical, class-based, component. This is shown in the views Access course students had held of university at school leaving age:

"I thought it (university) was for rich people."
"So did I. Or for people who had parents who were rich."
"And the people who you see coming out of the Poly were totally different, you know, they are not even from round here. I didn't see them as coming from Wolverhampton or from my area. They just seemed to be outside Wolverhampton and I didn't know them."

In the perception of the Access students at school leaving age university was not 'for them' but for other people. This perception was maintained by the students and might have a negative influence on the probability of other 'adults' returning to higher education.

People in university: teaching staff.

The sixth form students expressed little interest in the teaching staff in university, the other students were much more interesting perhaps reflecting their ambivalent attitudes toward school teaching staff. Only one group expressed opinions about staff.

"They'll treat us more like adults."
"They are not going to know who you are, you are going to be more like reference numbers, they aren't going to call you by first names, you are just a reference number."
"You get tutorials though, obviously it depends on the course, if you are on a course that doesn't offer these then you could speak to a lecturer as an individual."
"No but if the lecturer was available at other times to go and see, go and see him."

The Access students also expressed little interest in university teaching staff. One student expected that they would be "posh" but another thought that this would apply only to the senior staff and not to the "ordinary" lecturers. The general impression was that both groups held the teaching staff somewhat in awe and expected to develop distanced professional relationships with them.

Academic work.

Responses to university work produced differing responses from the two groups of students. Some of the Access students viewed the work with trepidation:

> Access students.
> Interview A.
> Interviewer. "What will university be like?"
> "I think it's going to be hard, hard work."
> Interview B.
> "Hard work"
> Interview C.
> "Hard work." (2 responses)
> "More hard work."

A student in Interview B, following discussion with a group of university students in their final year, concluded:

> "Hard work, very hard work for the first term .... er .... but after that, once they were in the system they were more happy with it. They've all really enjoyed the experience."

The view that university study was easier than A-levels was also expressed by an Access student.

> "All my friends go to university .... and they say, A-levels were, they were told actually at university that the hardest part education is A-levels. University is pretty straight forward. I know it's going to be hard and you can fall behind very easily but it's up to you, it's up to you whatever."

This suggestion was supported by the sixth formers. Students in all of the groups asserted independently and without a direct question that A-levels were more difficult than the first year of university study and possibly the most difficult part of the education system. Sources of this information included school staff, students currently in university and former university students.

> Group A.
> Interviewer. "You are going to be studying at a fairly high level, graduate level. Does that bother you?"
> "We've been told it's easier than A-levels."
> Interviewer. "Who told you that?"
> A number of responses. Everybody.
> Group B.
> Interviewer. "Does the standard of work worry you at all?"
> "Not really."
> "No."
> "We've been told A-levels are harder."

"Everyone says, when they finished university, everyone says, I mean, it's just not as hard as A-levels."
Group C.
Interviewer. ".... is it (the work) going to be something different, what's it going to be like, do you think?"
"Harder." Laughter.
Interviewer. "Just harder or what? Have you thought of what it's going to be like?"
"Will it be harder because they reckon that A-levels are the hardest part of education?"
Interviewer. "Where's that come from? Do you know who told you that?"
"My brother (former student) told me."
"It's just a general rumour I picked up that A-levels are harder."
Group D.
Interviewer. "What's it going to be like? What's university going to be like?"
"From what I've heard it's less work than A-levels."
"From what I've heard, yes."
Interviewer. "Who has told you that ...."
"People who are in university."
"A-level's the hardest exam you'll ever do." "How A-levels are the hardest years of your life."

"Harder" in this context embraced a number of elements: A-level was perceived to impose greater 'pressure' on students than degree studies, it required more teaching time, more class attendance time and it required the study of more than one subject.

"More stressful I mean. I've heard people say that A-levels are more stressful although the degree courses are academically harder to do it's easier to get through them because you're concentrating on one thing perhaps whereas with A-levels you've got three or four subjects."
"The pressure on you is supposed to be less than A-levels from what I've heard."
"My sister's at university and she only has to go in 3 times a week. The rest of the week she just doesn't."
"A lot of courses are much longer than my brother's which is only 8 hours per week."

This result adds support to the dominance of A-level stated in Chapter 7. Not only is A-level the major qualification for entry to higher education, and the benchmark against which other qualifications are measured but it also seems to carry some sort of 'mystique' surrounding the difficulty, quantity and 'pressures' of the work involved.

Timetabling in the sixth form might contribute to views of A-level. During discussion with group D it emerged that they were timetabled throughout the school day, taught sessions and supervised private study, so that attending classes

for only a set number of hours per week, as in university, seemed easy in comparison. It is probable that the other school groups also shared heavy timetabling commitments during the school day. This was supported from a discussion in Group C when they attempted to decide what might constitute a 'working day' in university and how they might equate their 'perceptions' of the relationship between 'work and pleasure'. The students seemed to understand that university study demanded working 'on your own' but did not seem to be able to relate this to teaching, timetabled teaching time, as student work. They also expressed concern for organising their time to complete work which did not have clearly defined deadlines. The structure of the way in which A-level is presented might therefore be a contributory factor in the perceptions held of it.

There was an indication in one group that work would not be problem because university standards have declined.

> Sixth formers
> Group. C.
> "You think, university, Oh you've got to be really clever to go there."
> "No."
> "No."
> "You've got to be able to work."
> "I don't think so, no."
> "You haven't even got to be able to work as in work."
> "Work all day."
> "Yes. You just. I don't know, anybody can go to university now"
> "Yes."
> "Yes. I think that."
> "That wouldn't have been the view a long time ago but now you can get, I know someone who's got a place with 1 E."
> "Two Ns and an E."

Feedback from students in university supported the view that work did not present a problem.

> "But I know of people who have come away with a degree and done absolutely nothing .... just had the best social time of their lives."
> "I've got this picture, well, one of my friends is there .... and they've given her a sheet at the beginning of term saying this is what you have got to do. As long as you get it done by the end of whenever, by the end of, a certain date you are all right. And she says, you know, its just a few essays and that's all. My friend phoned me up last night and she said, like, "I skipped my lecture", and so they don't seem to do any work."
> "I've been down and spent time with someone who is at uni' and just, 'Work, what's that?'."
> "Whenever I ask my friends 'How are you getting on there?' none of them ever once mentioned the work. They've always gone on about their house and work hasn't come up".

Despite this however there was evidence that the students were still worried about standards and the possibility of failure. Discussion in Group B, for example, expressed concern about moving into a more demanding environment with increased competition.

> Sixth formers.
> "Well one thing that I know, particularly with the area I'm doing (fine art) but also with every other area. At school you are in such a small group of people if you are good at something or you shine out in a particular area you are not going to be noticed at all at uni. You are just going to be like a little fish in a big pond, you are going to be nothing. Compared to like school "Oh yes, he's really clever", like at uni, you'll just get knocked down pegs because you won't be. You'll just be normal".
> Interviewer. "Is that something you picked up from people who are there?" "No."
> "It's like when you go for ...."
> "Not really, it's life."
> All talking together. Indisciferable.
> "At uni at the end of the day you've all got to get the same grades."
> "And you are all competing for the same thing."
> "So you've all got to be of the same kind of academic standard, there may be one or two that are slightly cleverer but in the end the ones, you are in the same boat."
> "I mean, you notice that when you come from GCSE to A-level. I mean if you specialise in a certain subject and you've been good at that subject to then go on to it in A-level, because you are mixing with other people you realise that there's other people that are just as good, you are not as good as you thought."
> Interviewer. "Does the work worry you at all?"
> "It does."
> "Yes, it does."
> "I'm worried I might not be able to handle the course."
> "I think it's like that when you start, you get into it and it develops. You can't get through university by bumming around. I don't think that at all."
> "That doesn't mean you don't have to work though. If you don't they kick you out."
> "Do many people not get a degree at the end of it?"
> "Depends on subjects doesn't it?"
> "I haven't heard of many people dropping out. Is it difficult to get kicked out? I'm worried now."

The third group (Group C) thought that it was necessary to concentrate on obtaining A-levels and to worry about the next stage when it occurred.

> Interviewer. "Does the work worry you at all?"
> "I haven't thought about it. Does a bit."
> "At this stage you are concentrating on what course you want to do and where you are going to go."

> "Try not to think about it too much anyway because you've got to pass your A-levels first. See, if you get wound up on university too much you might not even get there."
> "Anyway I'm not worried about that yet. I only want to get there."

Views of university work were also expressed as opposite ends of an 'instrumental' or 'academic' continuum. Some students saw university in terms of career development (this is discussed more fully in the next chapter) while others recognised opportunity for study in its own right. Perhaps the most extreme views were expressed by two sixth formers:

> Interviewer. "Have you ever thought about people who study a subject just purely for its own sake. Just because they are interested in it?"
> "They'd have to be mental."
> "The main purpose of going to university is to get a job at the end."

This conflicts sharply with the view of one of the Access students "To read, further study was mine (reason for applying to university)." Study subject was also important to many of the sixth formers:

> Interview B. Interviewer. "Now one last thing. You have all said that you are looking, university is going to bring you a job, or whatever, is, are any of you going really, you said you were going because you like sociology?"
> "Yes, but I don't know what I am going to do with it."
> Interviewer. "So, you are going because you like a subject? Has that got anything to do with it?"
> A number of responses. Yes.
> "That's the only reason I'm going."
> "That's the only reason why I'm going."
> "If you like it you have to be good at it."
> "I want to carry it on."
> "Because I enjoy it. Well, I'm doing dance because I enjoy it and because I like geography. It's my favourite A-level. It's the one I think I'll do best at." "It's the one I don't think I'm going to fail".
> Interview D. "The subject and like working on my own and I can do that, it's what I'm looking forward to."
> "Research."

The Access groups saw work as a major problem not only in terms of the level of difficulty but also managing work alongside their other commitments. The sixth formers were less concerned about work which they saw as part of the whole experience, or had chosen not to think about it. They believed that they would be able to cope, some students had an almost dilettante attitude, but recognised that they could be asked to leave if they failed to do so.

Social life.

Students in all of the schools focus groups were looking forward to the social life in university and saw it as a very important part of the experience, if not the most important part.

> Interview A.
> " .... the social life there (named university) is just, you know, and it's important as well as the academic".
> Interview B.
> "Well that's what uni is for. Everybody who has been , even the staff say, yes, you get your degree that's part of what it's for but you go for the social life
> Interview C.
> "What else do you hope to gain from it (university)?"
> "I think the social life is all important, not having a good social life it's going to affect your work 'cos you're unhappy, if your social life is packing up ....".
> Interview 4.
> Interviewer. "What else are you looking forward to?"
> "The union bar".

Alternatively university social life figured minimally in the Access group interviews:

> Access Students. Interview C.
> Interviewer. "There's the social life."
> "Not for me." (2 responses)
> "It's an optional extra."
> "I can't fit in a social life."
> Interview D.
> Interviewer. "Anybody else got any views of what it's (university) going to be like?
> "Lots of parties."
> "Cheap beer."
> Laughter.

For the sixth formers the social life was viewed as valuable experience of itself and as a support for academic learning ("You'd have a nervous breakdown otherwise") based upon the argument that an unhappy student, that is one with a poor social life, is not able to work effectively. Taken together, the fear of the settling in period and the need for a full social life reflects student need to be accepted by others in the new environment. It also reflects the development of the 'culture' of higher education with which the student had been surrounded: 'everyone' tells them this, students and former students in the person of friends, siblings, parents and teaching staff. Though students lacked knowledge of universities as

institutions in the higher education system they had fairly clear ideas of what living in university would be like: discourse had prepared them for this.

Perhaps the major difference in expectations between the schools and Access groups lay in university as a 'whole' experience. This was expressed most obviously in the exuberance of the sixth formers.

> Interviewer. "What's your life going to be like in university?"
> (Group A)
> "Great!"
> "Everybody says it's the best years of your life."
> "It's for life experience isn't it?"
> (Group D)
> "Exciting! It's freedom you know. I probably won't bother to turn up for half my lectures in the first year like everyone else does. I don't know, it's just a break, like the next phase in your life."
> "Just the freedom"
> (Group C)
> "A complete change of life isn't it really? It's like, I mean, it's nothing like going to a new school, as well as having lessons, tutorials .... if you go away from home you've got a new house .... new people, new surroundings, so, I mean, it's a total change of life."
> "It's experience."
> (Group B)
> "Independence."
> (Group C)
> "Yes, it helps you gain independence, being thrown into a situation where you've got to rely totally on yourself. You've got your parents to support you, you are still having education, but your parents are not looking after you all the time, independence with support before you become totally independent so that you can get a job."
> "Like a stepping stone between school and a career."

Viewed in terms of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) the sixth formers were not encumbered by considerations of making a living or providing for others. Their educational experience and social milieu, often manifest in the direct experiences of parents, siblings and peers, had prepared them over a period of time for entrance to university. They felt that they knew what the experience would be like. Their anxieties were mainly concerned with 'fitting in', obtaining acceptance, among others like themselves. They felt reasonably confident of coping with the work and expected to be successful. Agency, small scale social interaction and structure were in accord in directing them towards higher education. They perceived university as being 'for them' and for people 'like them'.

The Access students were less concerned with university as a 'life experience'. Many had the encumbrances of adult responsibilities, had others besides themselves to consider in decision-making, and were more concerned about adding

university to their existing lives. Their preparation for the experience had been shorter and less positive in its various dimensions than the younger students. Many of the Access students had experienced failure and disillusion in education and in employment and were generally less confident in their expectations. Agency, small scale interaction and structure had not been synchronised and in consequence the Access students often perceived themselves to be struggling against odds. University was less likely to be seen as 'for them', they anticipated a more 'alien' environment.

A further area related to expectations of university was covered in the study, choice of institution. The findings suggested that entry to university and choice of course were of primary consideration among students and choice of institution secondary. Results are presented in Appendix 11.

The study findings on expectations of university and anticipation's beyond university overlap. The discussion of results from both of these areas is dealt with at the end of the next chapter.

Chapter Fourteen. Aspirations beyond university.

This chapter discusses responses from the focus group interviews, sixth form and Access, to a question on where they expected to be 'in five years time', five years on from the time of the interview. The timespan was chosen to allow for the students to have completed a first degree course and moved on. The intention was to explore what students hoped to have gained as a result of their university experience.

Students in both the Access and sixth form groups found it difficult at first to speculate on where they expected to be five years on from the time of the interview. Most were able to provide an answer though with varying degrees of certainty. Of the 33 Access students who contributed 8 were unable to give a clear answer on the career they wanted to follow after university. The sixth formers as a group were more decided but recognised uncertainties.

The career aspirations of the Access course students and the subjects that the Sixth formers had applied to study in university are presented in Tables 14.1 and 14.2. pp 186 and 187 respectively. Direct questions on expected career outcomes were not asked of the sixth form students but aspirations are indicated in their choices of subjects studied. The table shows a mixture of specific career outcome, vocational areas and traditional subjects. Similar areas are found among the Access course students but the range is less wide and direction towards a specific career is more likely.

Improved career opportunities emerged as a major aspiration. One Access student's aspiration was stated very clearly: "Dosh! .... Lots of dosh!" Most contributors however expected to gain not only 'work' but a 'career'.

> Access students:
> "In a profession. In a job."
> "Being able to stand on your own two feet as well as get a job."
>
> Sixth formers:
> "I want a job at the end so that I don't have to scrimp off social services. If I want something I want to be able to buy it at the end of the day."
> "That's another reason why I don't want to do something that won't get a job at the end you might not like. I'd rather do a job I enjoy."
> "I'd rather be earning less and enjoying the job than ...."(drowned out)

Employment aspirations perceived as resulting from higher education included financial benefits, interesting work - 'a career', or 'profession' rather than a 'job' -

and independence. The latter seemed more significant than increased status which did not emerge from any of the interviews. Aspiration to increased status might have been implicit but was not stated perhaps because it implies aspiring to be 'better' than others and a group interview was perceived to be an inappropriate forum for the statement of such an aim. The evidence supports the findings on employment considered in Chapter 9. Higher education offers both an opportunity to escape from an unsatisfactory situation but also draws students towards the opportunity of improved employment opportunities. There is evidence therefore of the 'push' effect of prior experience and the 'pull' effect of the perceived opportunities offered by higher education.

Across the findings there was expectation of positive outcomes in employment but fear of graduate unemployment was expressed by some contributors to both groups:

> Sixth formers.
> Interview A.
> Interviewer. "Does it worry you that you that as a graduate you may not get a job?
> "It does."
> "It does."
> "Yes, you hear all these stories about people getting all these degrees and still no offers of jobs."
> Interview C.
> "I'm working at McDonalds now." (5 years into the future: intending to read sociology)
> (Laughter)"It's not funny. We could all be actually doing it."
> "I think these days you are having to have a degree just to stand a chance of getting a job."
> Interview C.
> "I don't want to go straight out into a job, you know what it's like."
>
> Access students.
> Interview D. "What will the situation be like for you as graduates."
> "Tough."
> "More and more jobs now want degrees, like they just want a degree and if it doesn't say degree on the application form they won't consider you, that's what I have been told."
> "Even with degrees some people don't get jobs."

These contributions represent the under current of anxiety among the students in both groups, that outcomes might not match expectations but, in a similar manner to anxieties about the higher education experience (Chapter 14) these are to be expected among those embarking upon a significant new project. The general impression presented by all of the groups was one of optimism. There was evidence of anxiety, and excitement, rather than pessimism.

Some contributors to both groups hoped to continue their studies either as post graduate students or in further vocational training.

> Access students.
> "I want to be a psychologist." .... "Half way through a post graduate course." (in 5 years time)
> "Hopefully starting to train for the career that my degree has got me into (business and finance). Well I mean I got told from my interview if I got a degree and come back I would get a training position so I've got something to aim for."
>
> Sixth formers.
> "I'd like to go on to forensic science when I've finished my first degree (biology)." .... "I'd like to specialise."
> "Yes, me, I thought about doing a sports degree and then going back to do physio." (applying for a sports studies course)
> "Do another (qualification) that combines with it."
> "Yes, PhD or MSc."
> "I might either do a PGCE just to get some experience and teach for a while or do a post grad. I don't know." (applying to read politics)

A number of the sixth form students were considering entering teaching after taking degrees in, for example, leisure studies or fine arts. The students thought that the advantages of staying in higher education beyond first degree studies included the fact that "You don't have to work" and avoided the need for "change" ("I'm not scared of working but it's the change isn't it?") while additional qualifications offered an opportunity to "get another rung up the ladder" and to "get a step ahead" (The only reference to increased status or competition beyond university). Students were not in agreement on the benefits of further study however:

> "I think that after being there for four years, I think that by that time I'd really need the money or something to show for all the years work I'd done."

Another student thought that it would be unreasonable to expect parental financial support to continue beyond a first degree.

In addition to the instrumental aspirations associated with career prospects the Access students also expressed more personal needs which they hoped to fulfil:

> "You may think I've got terrible lack of confidence. You may think that I really feel sorry for myself but I've had so many things go wrong in my life that, you know, well obviously I just live on hopes. I thought well I'll try again. There's something inside me hoping that something will work out in the end. I hope to God it will, you know ...." .... "There's one thing

I want in the future is that I belong somewhere. I feel that I've been on the outside."
"I hope I'll feel fulfilled."
"I hope that in 6 years time I'll feel fulfilled" ..... "Yes, because deep inside me .... there's .... I can catch up what I missed. I don't mean university life, I mean so many books I haven't read, there's so many things I don't know and in most, I mean, if you are in a formal learning environment you've got permission to pursue that whereas if you've got a job, or whatever you do, you have to make time to do it."
Interview D.
Interviewer. "Is self esteem in any way a part of this?"
"Yes, definitely."
Sounds of group agreement.
"If you get a degree it will make you different."
"For me it's the achievement I want it for, so it would make a difference to me."

Summary. Expectations of higher education and aspirations beyond university.

A generalised difference between the schools and Access groups emerges from the findings: both groups expected to change but with a different emphasis. The sixth formers expected change as part of a process of development, often anticipated over a period of time, while the Access students emphasised change rather than development. The sixth formers expected to be where they were, had expectations of where they would be and saw this as a process while the Access students were somewhat surprised to find themselves in this situation. This difference might be a function of age and the expectation of continued development among the young. Chapter 2 suggests that development continues throughout adult life. Perhaps adults are not always sufficiently aware of this proposition.

Further differences between the sixth formers and the Access students arose from their view of what the university experience meant to them at the stage in their lives at which they hoped to obtain entry. For the many of the sixth formers university was perceived as a 'total' experience, a complete change of life for a pre-determined period of time. During this period they expected to 'grow up', become independent of their parents and prepare for working life as an adult. For the Access students higher education represented change, another stage in their lives, which would need to be accommodated into their existing commitments.

Drawing the findings from both expectations of university and aspirations beyond university together three major areas emerged as common to both the sixth formers and the Access course students. The students expected that their higher education would provide:

- improved employment opportunities, not only a better job but a 'career' as opposed to 'work', and in some cases the opportunity of further training beyond first degree level;
- the opportunity for further study, and in some cases the opportunity of post graduate study;
- the opportunity for personal development, to 'grow up' in the case of the younger students, to become independent across the age groups, and among the Access students additional more personal developments.

The emphasis placed on each of these areas varied between individual students but across the samples the expectations of higher education were universally very high. The only criticisms of higher education institutions found among the sixth form contributions was their tendency to 'over advertise' themselves, failure to make entrance requirements clear in prospectuses and the tendency for some to be 'snobby'. The Access students were critical of one group of visiting university staff for making university life seem more difficult than the students thought reasonable. These criticisms however were directed towards specific institutions or aspects of the application process rather than the 'concept' of higher education and what it embodied. The very high expectations of the higher education experience and its outcomes among students emphasises the responsibilities of the institutions in meeting these expectations.

In terms of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) the evidence on expectations of the university experience and aspirations beyond university suggests that higher education exercises a very significant 'pull' effect upon applicants. Applicants are drawn from the left hand side of the model towards the point of application by the very significant benefits which are perceived to accrue. Evidence presented in former chapters suggests that where there is recognition of the advantages of higher education in the prior experiences of students, and appropriate support, students are most likely to succeed in gaining entry.

Table 14.1
Group Interviews. Access Students.
Aspirations X Gender.

	Female	Male
business/finance		2
careers guidance	1	
computing		1
counselling	2	
economics		1
law/politics		1
leisure management		1
nurse		1
psychologist		1
social work	2	
speech therapy	1	
teaching	6	
wants to work abroad	1	
sub-total	13	8
unsure	5	3
unsure, probably teaching	1	
unsure, perhaps teaching	1	
unsure, science	1	
unsure, wants to get out of engineering		1
sub-total	3	1
total	21	12
sample total(female 21, male 12)		33

Table 14.2
HE Course applied for x gender

Course/study programme	female	male
art foundation course	1	
accounting		3
biochemical science	1	
biology	1	
business studies		2
business systems		1
computer studies		1
dance/geography	1	
dentistry	1	
economics		1
electronics		1
engineering/communication		1
English literature		1
fine art	2	1
geography	2	
hotel management		2
law	3	2
leisure studies	1	1
maths	1	
media studies		1
ophthalmics	1	
pharmacology	1	
politics	1	
physics		1
psychology	1	
sociology	1	
sports studies	1	
teaching	2	
transport management		1
total	22	20

Chapter Fifteen. Conclusions.

In this chapter the major interactions between the components of the model and the implications of the study findings for higher education are discussed.

The results of the study show that interaction between two of the model components (Figure 1.2 p.7) is most significant in influencing entry to university; among the sample characteristics social class, and among aspects of prior experience social milieu and educational experiences, more specifically, home and school.

Interaction between social class, home and school is most effectively demonstrated in the contributions of two Access students.

> "My parents are strictly working class and I've always been from a working class background. My parents did wholeheartedly encourage me to further my education and I know that was my dad's .... now that my dad knows that I'm going to university he's walking on air. He really wants me to go, you know, higher and higher. But I didn't, I couldn't. I should have gone to the Girl's High School but I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay with my friends so they didn't force me. They didn't force me to do anything. So I stayed in the local comprehensive which was .... inadequate to say the least. And, you know, nobody went to university from there, it wasn't mentioned. It just wasn't an option. Even though my parents would have liked me to have done, they didn't know enough about the system to get me there."

> "Well there was a lot of pressure (at school to succeed academically) but I was anti the system. I was anti everything. So .... and I thought the education system .... because I could see .... I didn't understand the terminology of the time, the terms of reference, I just know that it was very much geared towards boys. Geared towards the professions. I mean, and .... er .... classicism was prevalent. I mean .... I was at .... when I started this school they was still at the tail end of fagging which like culturally was a million miles from me. I didn't understand it. I found the whole of my education different because of me coming from a working class background into a very much established middle class school environment and it was very difficult for me. I lost my school friends because I went to grammar school and I had no friends at the grammar school because I had a working class background. This was hell for me. My education was hell. It had nothing to do how bright my intellect ..... It was more to do with my social standing."

Both of the students quoted were female. The first was black and estimated to be in her early 20s and the second in her 40s at the time of the interview. Gender and ethnic origin are included in the characteristics of both students but both

emphasised the importance of social class to their contributions. Both students were academically able as witnessed by their selection at 11 plus and current expectations of university entrance. The quotations were the longest contributions recorded in any of the interviews perhaps indicating the significance of the content to the students.

Social milieu in both quotations includes the influence of parents and peer group and intimates the effects of community. In the first case the student refused to move away from the influence of peer group and community and in the latter the student chose to make this move and perceived herself to be isolated as a result. In each instance there was a lack of co-ordination between parents and education and in each instance both parents and schools were ineffective, though for different reasons.

It is argued that the interaction between the effects of 'home', community and peers, and school can be viewed in terms of a cumulative, 'cultural' perspective. Woods (1983) arguing from a 'symbolic interactionist' standpoint, suggests that people develop 'perspectives' which constitute the framework within which they make sense of the world. 'Perspectives' derive from 'cultures' which themselves develop:

> ".... when people come together for specific purposes, intentionally or unintentionally, willingly or unwillingly. People develop between them distinctive forms of life - ways of doing things and not doing things, forms of talk and speech patterns, subjects of conversation, rules and codes of conduct and behaviour, values and beliefs, arguments and understandings." (Woods 1983 ibid. p. 8)

An individual's part in these ways of thinking and behaving may not be recognised: they are heavily implicit and the individual "grows in to them" and comes to recognise them "as a natural way of life".

Taking Woods definition of 'culture' and 'perspective' (Woods 1983 p.8) the results from this study together with the literature review suggest first, that home and school support the development of a 'perspective' which attributes status and value to education as a long term goal (or alternatively not), and second, that the development of a positive perspective demands a 'four-way', interactive, dialogue between 'home', school, the prospective applicant to higher education, and their peer and community groups. The interaction between the cultural elements, aspects of experience in the model (Figure 1.2 p.7), produces perspectives on education which may be positive, negative or conflicting.

Pascal and Cox (1993. Cited in this study Chapter 2 p.33) found evidence of differing attitudes towards education among parents which affected the educational performance of their offspring. Developing these findings into the results of this study it is possible, to propose four categories of 'educational perspectives'

found among parents: supportive and knowledgeable, supportive and lacking in knowledge, disinterested and negative.

The 'supportive and knowledgeable parent' is seen to support the student in what they want to do, often provides a positive role model from her/his own experience of higher education, provides a structured framework for the student, provides financial support, can be expected to continue to provide support, and, understands the education system. The quantitative study sample includes parents in mainly professional or skilled occupations demanding education or training beyond school leaving age. Similarly among the sixth formers, though direct evidence of occupation or educational qualifications of parents was not sought, there are a number of references to higher education experience among parents and siblings. Such parents, known to be supportive, may therefore be described also as knowledgeable. Parents in this category may exert their influence at an early stage in the lives of their offspring who may not be aware of it. In effect children of 'supportive and knowledgeable parents' are provided from an early age with a positive 'perspective' on education.(Woods p.8)

The parent who is 'supportive and lacking in knowledge' wants to provide the same support as the 'supportive parent' but does not know how to do it. They offer guidance and support to the student at a personal level but are unable to provide educational support. Their own educational experience, for example, is such that they do not provide role models and can not help with practical inputs such as homework. Parents in this category are not able to offer appropriate guidance through the demands of the educational system.

> Access student.
>
> "I think as well, because my dad missed out educationally I didn't get any encouragement, well I did get a certain amount of encouragement but he couldn't sit down with me and help me with my homework. And looking back now I think I probably missed out a little bit."

Assistance with homework is only one, most visible, example of the lack of understanding of the demands of education and the organisation of the educational system among some parents: the ineffectiveness of 'sponsorship' from home found in the Pascal and Cox study (1993 p.33), quoted in Chapter 2 (p.34).

The disinterested parent simply shows no concern for the educational performance of the child while the negative parent sees no value in education, certainly beyond statutory school leaving age.(Chapter 6 p. 152. Heathfield and Wakeford 1990 p. 24.) Examples of both of these categories were found among the Access student responses.(Chapter 2 and Chapter 11)

These four categories (supportive and knowledgeable, supportive and lacking in knowledge, disinterested and negative) represent perspectives on education held by parents and developed in turn from their own experience, their cultures. Assuming that schools wish to develop pupils to the highest level that they can attain, and that this is the school 'perspective', then in situations in which parental and schools perspectives 'match', the development of the child through the education system is supported. Progress will also require two other factors: first, that the perspective of the child, in terms of their perceived needs and aspirations, also forms a 'match' with the other two, and second, the supportive influence of other factors in the social milieu of the child, their peer groups and community.

Referring back to experiences on school leaving (Chapter 8) and influences (Chapter 12) the 6th formers experienced a 'positive match' between the four elements, 'home', school, their own aspirations and their peer group, perhaps in part due to early direction from their parents. Alternatively, in some of the experiences of the Access students there was evidence of a 'negative match' in which neither home nor school was working to the advantage of the student.

The 'mismatch' in the case of the parents who are 'supportive but lacking in knowledge' arises out of their lack of educational experience. They are unable to effectively manage the educational element so that while the child might possess academic potential which the school is effectively attempting to develop this is not utilised. An example is the Access student who did not take up the Grammar School place (p.188). Disinterested and negative parents fail to effectively manage either the home or educational situation or to take account of the needs of the student. The school might be doing its job, the child might be able, but the home situation is not supportive. This would appear to apply in the second student contribution (this Chapter p.188).

Failure to take account of the perspective of the student may cut across the other parental categories. A 'mismatch' between the aspirations of the child and their parents means that parents cannot be described as 'supportive'. The Access student, for example, who felt that she was 'pushed' into nursing

> "My parents didn't .... I was an only child and I was very protected. They didn't want me to leave home or .... er .... do anything extraordinary. They thought nursing was nice and safe for their little girl."

or the student who was not allowed to stay on into the 6th form

> "I wanted to stay on at school but I wasn't allowed to." (because she was a girl)

In both of these instances the parents probably had their best interests of their offspring at heart, were in this sense supportive (in the latter instance the brother was allowed to stay on) and supported the work of the school, but failed to take account of the aspirations and perceived needs of the student. There is evidence from the 6th form interviews of parents attempting to influence the choice of higher education institutions, courses and careers which the students selected.

> "My mum and dad just don't want me to go away. My dad doesn't want me to go at all I don't think."
> Interviewer. "Are any other dads like that with their daughters."
> "I said like 'Liverpool's a possibility.' 'No, you don's want t go there. Too far away."
> "My dad just wants me to go to a nice area, as he puts it."
> "She (male student's mother) wants me to go to a 'Red Brick' university or re-sit my A-levels if I don't get them."
> "My mother was really bad because when I said I wanted to do medicine, 'Oh, you don't want to do medicine'." .... When I said I wanted to do dentistry it was as if a load had been lifted off her shoulders." (female student)

The argument thus far might be taken to be critical of many parents whereas in fact it highlights the dilemma of parenting; effectively guiding a child into adult life on the basis of past knowledge and experience. The implications are not that parents lack interest or are negative towards their children but that they do not always see education as relevant or of value. This parental lack of knowledge or understanding, arising out of their own lack of appropriate experience, reduces their power to contribute effectively to interaction with the school and the child on the child's educational performance or future. In the case of the disinterested or negative parent to avoid involvement in interaction.

The significance of the social milieu, especially parents, is highlighted in the evidence from the questionnaire and focus groups in Chapter 12. The results suggest that 'formal' influences are significantly less effective than 'informal' on staying on at school and on university entrance. Evidence from the questionnaire sample suggests that parents were the most significant source of support in entry to higher education and that this support continued beyond school leaving age and in to adult life. It is reasonable to suggest therefore that the social milieu, particularly parents, has, through the development of a perspective on education, a profound effect on educational performance. It is reasonable further to argue that the effects of positive, negative or conflicting perspectives on education is cyclical. Parents develop perspectives which are in turn transmitted to their offspring and become accepted.

Recognition of the significance of parents does not imply under-estimation of the contribution of schools, and at a later stage, colleges of further education. The

perspective of the school, the development of the potential of pupils, may be clear but schools vary in the extent to which they are successful in its development. Inadequate schools undoubtedly contribute to poor educational attainment just as good schools are effective. In the cycle of negative or ambivalent parental perspectives on education, however, schools may find themselves dealing with perspectives at odds with their own, held, not by a single pupil, but by communities. In such communities negative, or ambivalent, perspectives towards education may have grown up over generations and in schools in these communities there will, in consequence, have developed no tradition of entrance to higher education. Alternatively some schools will benefit from the support of the largely positive and knowledgeable perspectives of the majority of parents and will have a tradition of educational success among pupils to transmit over time.

The relative significance of parents or schools on educational attainment is, however, perhaps less significant than the interaction, or lack of interaction between them. Improving standards in schools without taking account of the effects upon school performance of parents, peers and the social milieu seems unlikely to be effective, particularly among those pupils and parents least likely to have a positive perspective on education. Raising standards in schools, based on the argument that potential students would be better equipped in terms of qualifications to compete for entry to higher education, will not necessarily convince students or their parents that education or higher education is 'worth having' and therefore 'worth working for'. Potentially more powerful influences from outside school may convince them otherwise. The alternative is to develop positive perspectives shared by both schools and in the social milieu of the child.

The overall effect of positive and negative 'perspectives' on education is to create groups of students who, at the extremes, see higher education as 'for them' or not 'for them'. The effect of the components of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) operating to formulate a positive 'perspective' on education is, as shown in the findings of the questionnaire, to support students to stay on at school and move into higher education at school leaving age, to stay in the education system at school leaving and to increase the likelihood that students will continue to return to the education system to meet perceived needs at a later stage in their lives.

The findings overall imply that the under-representation of social classes IV and V in higher education is related to an interaction between poor schools and lack of knowledge and experience among parents. This implies that the relative significance of schools and parents is perhaps less significant than the interaction, or lack of interaction, between them.

Recourse to structural factors as represented in the right hand side of the model (Figure 1.2 p.7) for a means of improving the representation of students from social classes IV and V in higher education offers little indication of change. The evidence presented in this study suggests that increasing student numbers in higher

education increases the opportunity for more middle class students to enter or re-enter. Higher education institutions are similarly unlikely to be effective in changing this situation. 'Open access' admissions policies, even if they were put into practice, seem unlikely to attract those who do not see higher education as 'for them'. Increased resources to increase the number of students in higher education is unlikely to be effective in encouraging academically able potential students from social classes IV and V. It seems more logical to direct resources and efforts towards a much earlier stage in the education process in developing positive perspectives towards education among parents, increased involvement of parents in the education of their children and improved interaction between school, parent and child. Evidence from Chapter 12 suggests that there is a perceived 'professional divide' between those employed in the 'formal' education system and parents and families. Increased interaction between education and social milieu implies that there is need for clarification of the relationships between those involved, of their prospective rights and responsibilities and of the development of mutual systems in support and development of these.

Evidence from the literature review (Chapter 2) the questionnaire sample and the focus groups suggest that small numbers of students are able to overcome the lack of a positive perspective on education and succeed in gaining entry to higher education. There is also some evidence that the number of adult students falling into this category is increasing, for example, the impact of Access courses is indicated in Chapter 2 and in the research findings. Explanations for the success of this small group of students are not available from the study findings. Speculation suggests that individual variation among the experiences of applicants might account for this result. Individual agency, in some instances, might also be significant in overcoming difficulties. In both the qualitative and quantitative findings (Chapter 11 and 12) there is evidence that the students perceived themselves to have made 'their own' decision in entering higher education. These findings must be treated with caution however since the students may have been unaware of the influences operating on them. Both Bhaskar (1979) and Woods (1983) draw attention to individual lack of awareness of the cultural forces at play. Further research into the experiences of students who succeed in education in the absence of a positive perspective would not only offer some explanation for their success but also throw light on the wider situation.

Returning to the right hand section of the model, the argument as presented thus far does not suggest that there are no implications for higher education and its constituent institutions in increasing opportunities particularly for adults. The evidence suggests that the qualifications and prior experiences of mature students may be undervalued in terms of both entry to higher education and in the curriculum. There is evidence that a limited range of qualifications, dominated by A-level, are accepted for entry to higher education. Adult applicants may have a variety of qualifications but the evidence questions the extent to which these are acceptable without additional items from the 'standard list'.

In terms of the curriculum the experiences of students prior to entry raises a range of issues. If higher education is viewed as a 'stand alone' activity, valid in its own right as academic study, research, and/or a preparation for a profession or higher level vocation, then the prior experiences of students are irrelevant except insofar as they demonstrate the academic level required for entry. The onus is upon the student to meet the demands of the programme of study and the responsibilities of the institution are to ensure an environment conducive to learning and student safety and welfare.

If alternatively, students are viewed as a contributory element in the interactive process of their own learning then their prior experience is a factor which affects the contribution they are able to bring to the programme of study and to the institution. In turn this carries implications for the institution to take account of prior experience not only in admissions procedures but also in the structure and services offered and in the curriculum. The former approach, higher education as a 'stand alone' activity, implies that a diversity of students will become homogeneous in terms of learning while the latter suggests that diversity might become an educational tool to the benefit of student and institution. The evidence of prior experience suggests that adults are entering higher education with a range of expertise and experience which might be further developed in their higher education programmes. It is argued that the 'new' student in higher education might imply new approaches to the presentation of learning and the curriculum. This implies further study of the responses of a diversity of students to the learning programmes on offer in the diversity of courses and institutions which now constitute higher education.

Limitations and reflections on the research process.

Three areas of the questionnaire(Appendix 2) produced limited results. Section 3. (Educational Experience) Question 20, requested information on the amount of time it had taken students to obtain the qualifications for entry to higher education, assuming that they had not obtained appropriate qualifications at school. Student response was poor . The results are presented in Appendix 8. In hindsight, and given the results from the major part of this section, the question under-estimated the variety of student educational experience and created confusion surrounding age of leaving school and age of leaving full-time education.

Responses to Section 6 (Accommodation) (a) and (b) were also omitted from the results. This section (Results Appendix 13) included two questions which were intended to gather information on what kind of accommodation students were living in during attendance at university, with whom they shared this accommodation, and whether they were separated from their families during term time. The aim was to relate the findings from this question to those on choice of university and distance from home, to finance, and to compare the findings with student characteristics. Unfortunately question (a) resulted in confusion by

presenting the students with too many alternatives. It should have been divided into two parts covering first, where respondents were living and second, who with. Confusion created by question (a) resulted in the findings from question (b) becoming meaningless.

Questions 14 and 15, Section 2 (Occupational Experience) (Questionnaire Appendix 2) also produced poor information though this reflected the characteristics of the sample more than the structure of the question. The aim of the question was to explore discrimination at work on the grounds of age, ethnic origin, gender and disability. Given a sample which was predominantly white, 'middle class', able-bodied, young and including many with a limited experience of employment, the questions were largely ignored and the responses which were offered too few to draw any valid conclusions. (Results Appendix 12)

The routes element of section 3 of the questionnaire, (Appendix 2) Educational Experience, might have been designed to facilitate more efficient and quicker processing of the data. Question 4 (requested information of whether the student later returned to education after leaving school) was superfluous and the remaining questions might have been organised more effectively.

The process of looking for routes included in the study suggested, however, that the approach, in its statistical usage, might be further developed. It was possible, from the data to produce profiles for the three cohorts included in the study. There was sufficient information available in a designated route, as a statistical characteristic, to facilitate at least a general understanding of the source of applicants and their prior educational experience. More so, for example, than based on data on age, gender and last institution attended. If further development was to take place Section 5 of the questionnaire would need to be adapted, perhaps into a flow chart, 'tick in the box' format, to be read by an OMR, and fed into a prepared data base format for analysis. The latter would improve the efficiency of the 'plotting' process applied in the study. The addition of prefixes or suffixes to the designated route letter would allow for the inclusion of gender and ethnic origin in the data. Knowledge of entry profiles for designated groups of students might be valuable in planning, marketing and for comparing groups of students.

There was a loss of data from the Access groups interviews on finance. This information would have been valuable to compare with the findings from the other elements of the study. Accepting this, the subject of finance only emerged during one interview. It was a problematic area to introduce to adults in an open debate. It is possible that the interviews might have been more closely structured but it is probable that valid data would have been lost as a result of the additional control exerted by the interviewer. Given more results from the Access interviews it might have been possible to contribute more from the study on the effects of finance on entry to university.

Thumbnail biographies were obtained from some of the contributors to the Access focus groups. It was not possible to produce as many of these or in as much detail as had been hoped from the data. Results, Appendix 14.

Reflections.

The study consists of the process of production and the outcome. It commenced with a fragmented, uncoordinated collection of personal, 'common-sense' observations and a desire from the university for more informed analysis (Preface p.2). The process of study development was essentially exploratory and comprised three 'strands'. First, the development of at least a background knowledge of higher education and its students which was an unfamiliar territory to the researcher. Second, the development of a theoretical orientation. This proved complex, time consuming and involved a number of 'blind alleys' in attempting to not only understand but, initially, to contribute to the structure/agency debate. Though, at times, frustrating the time and effort proved necessary in exploring alternatives before arriving at a theoretical framework which 'made sense' to the researcher and within which it was possible to progress the study. The third 'strand' was research method and accompanying techniques. This 'practical' element involved the consideration of alternatives, selection of methods, together with the production of research instruments and data collection and analysis.

The process, the interweaving of the three strands, gaining knowledge of the topic area, the development of a theoretical orientation, and method and technique, and drawing these together into a final document, comprised the learning experience of the researcher. Viewed in this sense, not 'how much' was learned nor 'how well', but judged in terms of new experiences, new academic perspectives, the opportunity to practice new skills and to draw on existing knowledge and expertise, the study was, on reflection, a success.

Outcome is less easily assessed in terms of reflection. It is easier to find satisfaction in the experience of process than the result which involves consideration of the 'usefulness' and the contribution of the study. All reflection in these terms must take into account the small scale of the study. In personal terms, reflecting on the scattered and uncertain observations with which the study commenced, the 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of students and their biographies has been developed and expanded. The factors surrounding entry to higher education are better understood and the routes of entry clarified. The use of descriptive analysis of the questionnaire sample is justified in retaining a sense of members of the sample as 'real' people. The study makes a contribution, however small, to a knowledge of student experience where data is currently lacking. The study also suggests that focus groups have a contribution to make to educational research and that there are benefits which accrue, in terms of triangulation and the 'richness' of results, from the application of more than one research method. The isolation of a positive 'cultural perspective' on education as an influence on entry to higher education is

significant. Indications of future areas of research were also obtained. Reflection offers some indication of 'success' in terms of outcome but this is less readily experienced, being more open to the interpretation of others, than that gained from process.

Appendix. 1 Ethnic Origin and entry to higher educaton.

The extent of involvement of ethnic minorities in higher education has received increased clarification since 1990. In response to uncertainty resulting from a lack of hard evidence (Modood 1993 p.168) PCAS and UCCA decided to ask candidates to specify their ethnic origin. The discussion which follows is based upon three analyses of PCAS and UCCA data carried out by Madood (1993), Taylor (1992a), who also made use of some additional UCCA data, and Connelly (1994).

Uncertainty remains resulting from a complex interaction between ethnic origin and a number of other factors including; gender, student age on entry, student choice of courses and institutions, qualifications on entry, route of entry, geographical location, social class of parents and wider social factors, together with variation in response to ethnic minorities between sectors of the higher education system, and individual institutions. The findings are outlined and then discussed.

Modood took UCCA and PCAS data for applications and admissions to higher education for 1990 and 1991. (The distinction between universities and polytechnics, and between UCCA and PCAS was abolished in 1992 after these data were produced(Modood 1993 p. 168)). He compared the representation of ethnic minority groups making application to and entering university with their representation in the population using Census data for 15 to 24 year olds. This made it possible to calculate the extent to which various groups, compared with their representation in the population, were under or over-represented in higher education and in applications to higher education.

Overall pattern

Ethnic minorities as a whole were found to enjoy a representation in higher education at twice their population size in applications and somewhat better in admissions.

> ".... ethnic minority numbers and representation is greater than most people would have guessed(no doubt in part assisted by the recent expansion of the system)" (Madood 1993 ibid p. 172).

Connelly(1994 ibid p.22) argues that:

> "Modood's is the first definitive evidence of the impressive achievement of minority groups at this level of the UK education system."

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that ethnic minorities applied in greater numbers to PCAS as compared with UCCA institutions (52,319, 14.3% and 41,118, 10.25% respectively). They were also represented at almost twice the percentage in PCAS than UCCA institutions(15.66% compared with 7.8%). In addition the proportion of ethnic minorities in PCAS increases between applications and admissions (14.3% rising to 15.6%) whereas for UCCA the proportion decreases (10.25% falling to 7.8%) which Modood (p. 169)suggests raises a question of bias in selection. Giving rise to the query that ethnic minority groups were denied access to the more prestigious group of institutions.

The PCAS data show that all minority groups did better than average and whites only slightly worse in terms of acceptance, compared with their representation in the age cohort, which suggests no bias against minority groups. But the UCCA data show an overall hierarchy in acceptance rates. The average success rate is 60%, which is also the rate for whites, but Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi acceptance rates are 10% to 15% below this, Pakistanis 15% below, Africans 20% and Carribbeans 25%. Proportionately ethnic minority groups were less likely to apply to UCCA and were represented in universities in only half the proportion of the other sector (UCCA 7.8, PCAS 15.6).

This might be explained in differences in qualifications. Applicants through UCCA from all minority ethnic groups had lower scores than Whites (Connolly p.28). At top end of A-level performance (30 - 26 points) the selection rates for all groups were similar, just over 90%. But the overall pattern shows inconsistencies. For example, at the middle range of scores the average acceptance rate is 60%, the rate for whites, but the Chinese are 10% below this as are Asian groups and Caribbeans. At the lower end the discrepancies between groups are reduced but inconsistencies remain.(Modood p. 177) Thus, acceptance rates vary between ethnic groups with almost identical A-level scores.

Different approaches to admissions between the two sectors might be a factor (Connolly p. 28). UCCA institutions look for applicants at 18 directly from school and rely almost exclusively upon A-level results. Alternatively PCAS institutions are more likely to have a special admissions policy for mature students, often not involving A-levels.

UCCA (UCCA 1992 pp. 6-7) offers 5 reasons to explain differences at similar A-level scores and differences in overall acceptance rates:

- low applications from ethnic minorities for courses with low entrance requirements, notably teacher training which at 12.6 has the lowest mean A-level score for applicants
- minority groups are more likely to apply for those subjects to which it is most difficult to gain entry; 20% to medicine and law, three times that of whites
- ethnic minorities are more likely to apply to a limited number of universities since they are more likely to apply to institutes near home. For example, 41%

of Asians and 50% of Blacks applied to 35 institutions in London and South East (compared with 20% of Whites). All three of these factors place ethnic minorities in a situation of more intense competition than whites

- 12% (in 1991) of applicants with 2 or more A-levels re-sat some or all of their grades. Ethnic minorities were more than twice as likely than whites to fall into this category. This will affect applications since selections give less weight to qualifications obtained at more than one sitting
- the 1989/90 UCCA report points out that minority applications have lower average A-level score than whites.

Connelly(p.22) suggests that Modood does not take sufficient account of the raw scores for applications. It has been assumed in the past that more members of ethnic minority groups applied through PCAS than UCCA and that this was too some extent responsible for the variation in acceptances. Connelly argues that the difference in application rates is not sufficiently great to support this assumption and that the data suggest that institutions listed by UCCA have been less willing to recognise the aspirations of minority groups.

Variation between individual institutions.

Variation between sectors leads on to the possibility of variations between individual institutions; the possibility that ethnic minorities might be concentrated in less prestigious institutions. Modood (ibid p. 172) took the proportion of students from ethnic minority groups admitted to degree courses in 1990 by those polytechnics where the proportion of ethnic minority students admitted to such courses was 10% or more. The findings show admissions for ethnic minorities to be concentrated in 17 polytechnics (of which the institution in which this study was carried out was one). These were found not to be among the less prestigious institutions but there was a geographical concentration in particular regions; London, and to a lesser extent the Midlands. Modood (bid p.173) argues that this is a positive rather than a negative finding.

> "In any case there seems to be the possibility that the concentration is a result of some positive choice, both between different polytechnics and between some polytechnics and some universities, and not simply a rejection, or anticipated rejection, by more prized institutions."

Admissions policies may again be a factor, however. Connolly(1994 p.27) argues that many former polytechnics have established themselves as community institutions with a high admission rate for local applicants.

UCCA did not publish data for individual institutions but left this to the institutions themselves(Modood ibid p. 174). Cambridge, which cannot described as one of the less prestigious institutions, published. The results indicate that Cambridge admits

10% below the Census figure for ethic minorities in this age group but Chinese, Indians and Bangladeshis do just as well as the Census average. Pakistanis and Black groups do considerably worse.

Concern about the issues raised by the PCAS and UCCA data led the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to request an independent analysis from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick (Taylor 1992). UCCA made data available from 8, unnamed, institutions. These data also show considerable variation in applications and admissions, between minority groups and between institutions and also between subjects studied. Regional variation was again found. As with Polytechnics, universities in areas with higher proportions of ethnic minorities attract and admit higher numbers of ethnic minorities. For example, in 2 of the 8 universities, which were in or near London, ethnic minorities formed a third of all applications in 1990, and at one of them 12% of admissions were from Indians (Taylor 1992 p.36).

With reference to the finding that applicants from ethnic minority groups 'disadvantage themselves' by again selecting local institutions through UCCA Connolly highlights inequalities in local applications(Connolly p. 29).Taking Taylor's data (1993 p. 437) she explores the disadvantage experienced by ethnic minorities in applying locally. Table App 1.1 indicates that White applicants are more likely to obtain a place in a local institution.

Table App1.1 Applications to local institutions (UCCA)

	applicants %	accepted %
Black	50	8
White	30	15
Asian	38	12

> "So, although all applicants are disadvantaged by applying to local institutions, some are more disadvantaged than others." (Connolly 1994 ibid p. 29)

The extent to which Ethnic minorities are limiting themselves in applying to local institutions, or the extent to which their choice is being limited is therefore in doubt. Connolly (1994 ibid p. 30) argues that their choice is being severely limited.

Selection of subjects

A further variation was found in the selection of subjects and disciplines for study made by ethnic minority groups through UCCA. These groups applied disproportionately for the two subjects which are most difficult to enter in terms of A-level scores, medicine and law, and under applied for the least competitive option, teacher training.(Moddod ibid p.174) Data for PCAS admissions 1991 show for example, Business and Administration to be the most popular choice for Asian groups, whites and African women, Chinese men and African men prefer

engineering and technology. In addition to education, minority groups are either absolutely or relatively under-represented in a number of disciplines including physical science, architecture, building and planning and humanities (Modood ibid p.175). However, the overall the size of ethnic minority applications "ensures that most groups are not under-represented" (Modood. ibid p 174).

Routes into higher education.

Applicants through UCCA from colleges of further and higher education are less likely to be accepted than those from schools, but applicants from racial minority groups are more likely to use this route to at least twice the extent of whites(17%) and nearly 3 times so in the case of Blacks. (Taylor 1992 p.24). The highest rate of acceptance is from independent schools in which ethnic minorities are under represented. Applicants without A-levels or equivalent qualifications have low rates of acceptance. A category into which significant numbers from ethnic minorities fall.

Age on entry

While new entrants over the age of 21 now make up half of all admissions to higher education, over 80% of them continue to be in polytechnics and a greater proportion are likely to be black compared to other groups (Modood (p. 178).

Modood takes the population between 15 and 24 but Connolly (p. 22) argues that Modood underestimates age on entry to higher education as a factor relevant to ethnic minority groups. Nearly half of White men and over half of White women enter at age 18. The Chinese, Bangladeshis and Indians approach this figure this but:

> "a significant proportion of these groups enter a year later suggesting an alternative route to higher education with a higher proportion of resits in examinations. Of these groups a higher proportion of women than men apply at 18 years."
> (Connelly ibid p. 22)

But, the 'most startling' difference is found among Black groups: only 6% of African men enter at age 18, 40% when they are over 25 with Affro-Carribean women at 30%. Taking account of age variation on entry, in effect, the under-representation of the Black groups is greater than Modood suggests.

Connolly argues that:

> "Age, then, rather than ethnic origin, seems to be the most significant factor in the admissions rate for the PCAS sector."

This probably exaggerates but age is undoubtedly a factor which interacts with ethnic origin.

Parental Social Class.

Many of the factors which emerge in interaction with ethnic origin are also associated with social class: students who are more likely to apply from FE, less likely to apply from independent schools, more likely to apply without A-levels and more likely to apply after the age of 18(Modood p. 178).

Using Taylor's unpublished, UCCA data, Modood(p.179) finds that ethnic minorities are less represented in the professional and intermediate classes and that the acceptance rate for these social classes is consistently higher than those coming from skilled and unskilled working classes. But, 'most striking about this data are the ways in which ethnicity fails to conform to the general pattern of social class.

> "The biggest anomaly for capturing differences by race and ethnicity within class analysis is the pervading underlying fact that groups with more disadvantaged class profiles than whites, a contrast which was probably even more severe in previous years and decades, produce much larger proportions of applicants and admissions in the national higher education system. The fact that despite all of the social and institutional (not to mention cultural) disadvantages stacked against them, some ethnic minorities are using higher education to alter their own class composition, offers one, if small, counter-example to the view that class inequalities in higher education remain unchanged, and that education has failed to operate as a force for 'class abatement'." Modood (p.178)

The findings over the whole of the higher education system offer grounds for optimism and a recognition of the achievements of student from ethnic minority groups. There remain considerable variations within this pattern however.

TEXT BOUND INTO THE SPINE

UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

Appendix 2

Introduction

Student Experience Questionnaire

A bigger range of different kinds of people are now becoming students in the University and are entering by a number of different routes. If the University is to continue in its stated aims of meeting the needs of students, enhancing equality of opportunity and providing a quality learning environment the University needs to be aware of, and to understand relevant student experiences both prior to entry to and during learning programmes. This questionnaire is part of a study which aims to investigate student experience of the University.

The following includes questions about your experiences before you came to University and during the first semester of your course. ALL INFORMATION WILL BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE.

Instructions:

This is a machine readable questionnaire, please follow the instructions Use a pen (not red) or pencil (Pencil can be erased if you make a mistake) Indicate your choice with a horizontal line in the appropriate box e.g. ▬ Do not use crosses or ticks

SECTION 1 Course and Personal Details

1 Name .....

2 University Enrolment Number .....

3 University Course Title MODDS ..... Primary B Ed ..... Secondary B Ed .....

4 For what award are you registered? Honours Degree ..... Dip H.E ..... Other (please state .....

5 Subjects of Award

a) Main Subjects N.B. Students taking B.Ed should not include Education as one of their subjects.

Art/design ▬ English ..... History ..... Religious Studies ..... Mathematics .....

Technology ..... Physical Education ..... Education ..... Geography ..... Science .....

Music ..... Technology:Design & Technology ..... Technology:Business Studies .....

Others (please state) .....

b) Subsidiary/minor/joint Subjects

Art/design ..... English ..... History ..... Geography ..... Mathematics .....

Technology ..... Physical Education ..... Religious Studies ..... Science ..... Music .....

Technology:Business Studies ..... Technology:Design & Technology .....

Others (please state) .....

6 Ethnic Origin

White ..... Black ..... Black-Caribbean ..... Pakistani ..... Asian ..... Black-other .....

Bangladeshi ..... Indian ..... Black African ..... Chinese ..... Other ..... Asian-other .....

7 Age, in years, at commencement of course?

under 20 ..... 20-24 ..... 25-29 ..... 30-34 .....

35-39 ..... 40-44 ..... 45-49 ..... over 50 .....

8 Are you registered disabled? Yes ..... No .....

9 Do you have a disability but have chosen not to register? Yes ..... No .....

10 Are you an overseas student? Yes ..... No .....

11 Are you in married/living with a partner? Yes ..... No .....

12 Do you have any children? Yes ..... No .....

13 If yes please indicate your children's age group.

5 or under ..... 6-10 ..... 11-13 .....

14-16 ..... 17-18 ..... over 18 .....

14 Do you have any dependent adult relatives? Yes ..... No .....

SECTION 2 Occupational Background

This section deals with any experience of work you may have had prior to commencing your University course.

1	Have you at any time been in full-time employment? (include membership of the armed forces)			Yes		No
2	For how long were you in full-time employment?	Up to 6 months	Up to one year	1-3 years	4-7 years	Over 8 years
3	Did you leave full-time employment for Family commitments including child-rearing?			Yes		No
4	Please state the title of your main occupation (this may not have been you last job).					
5	Please state the title of your father's main occupation					
6	Please state the title of your mother's main occupation					
7	Have you had experience of being unemployed and in receipt of benefit? (i.e. 'officially' unemployed as opposed to not working')			Yes		No
8	How many times did you become unemployed?	Once	2-4 times	5-7 times		
9	What was the longest period for which you were unemployed?	Up to 6 months	7-12 months	13 months to 2 years	More than 2 years	
10	Did your experience of unemployment influence your decision to return to education?	Yes	No	Not applicable		
11	Have you had experience of Youth Training (Government funded training schemes for young people)?			Yes		No
12	Have you had experience of Employment Training (Government funded training schemes for adults)?			Yes		No
13	Were you involved in a work experience programme as part of your school or college course?			Yes		No
14	During my occupational career I experienced overt (undisguised) discrimination on the grounds of:	Race	Gender	Disability	Age	No experience of discrimination
15	During my occupational career I believe that I experienced covert (concealed) discrimination on the grounds of:	Race	Gender	Disability	Age	No experience of discrimination
16	Did your experience of employment influence your decision to return to education?			Yes		No

SECTION 3 Educational Experience

Students now enter university by a number of different educational routes. This section asks questions about the route you followed. It is quite complicated because there are a range of possible alternatives. You may have experienced more than one of the alternatives listed. Please try to include everything appropriate.

School

1	Did you leave school at compulsory school leaving age?			Yes		No
2	How old were you when you left full-time schooling?	15	16	17	18	
3	Did you:					
	a. stay on at school but not take an A level course?			Yes		No
	b. stay on at school and in the sixthform and take A levels?			Yes		No
	c. leave school and go directly to Further Education?			Yes		No
	d. leave school and go into employment?			Yes		No
	e. leave school and go into some form of training?			Yes		No
	f. leave school and go to an alternative not listed here?			Yes		No
4	If you left school to go into employment, or for other reasons, did you later return to take a Further Education course (other than recreational courses)?			Yes		No
5	If you left work to go into employment did your work offer training leading to qualifications?			Yes		No

6 If your work offered qualifications were these sufficient for University entrance? Yes ..... No .....

Sixth form (If you did not go into the sixth form ignore this question)

7 After leaving the sixth form did you:

Come directly to university? .....
Go directly to a college of Further Education? .....
Take a year out? .....
Leave school for employment? .....
Take an alternative not listed here? .....

Further Education (If you did not go into FE ignore questions 8 & 9)

8 During your attendance in FE did you follow any of the following.
You may have followed more than one:

A course at O/GCSE Level? .....
An A Level course? .....
A BTEC course? .....
A course leading to a vocational qualification? .....
An Access Course? .....

9 After leaving college (Further Education) did you:

Come directly to University? .....
Take a "year out"? .....
Leave to go into employment? .....
Take an alternative not listed here? .....

Access Courses

10 If you followed an Access Course was it: Full-time ..... Part-time .....

11 If you followed an Access Course what was the duration of the course?
1 year ..... 2 years ..... 3 years .....

Post School Education: other

12 Have you followed any courses other than Access Courses as an "adult" following a break in your education after leaving school? Yes ..... No .....

13 Did you follow more than one such course? Yes ..... No .....

14 Did you follow a full-time course? Yes ..... No .....

15 Did you follow a part-time day course? Yes ..... No .....

16 Did you follow any evening courses? Yes ..... No .....

17 Have you followed any Open University courses? Yes ..... No .....

18 Have you studied any other form of open or distance learning courses? Yes ..... No .....

19 Educational Qualifications: What formal educational qualifications did you obtain prior to entry to University?

O Level	.....	GCSE	.....
A Level	.....	Access to Higher Education Certificate	.....
BTEC	.....	SCOTVEC	.....
Scottish Leaving Certificate	.....	Irish Leaving Certificate	.....
Overseas Qualification	.....	International Baccalaureate	.....
European Baccalaureate	.....	Scottish Higher	.....
No formal qualifications	.....	ONC	.....
OND	.....	HNC	.....
HND	.....	Dip H E	.....
Degree	.....	Open University Credits	.....

Other qualification/s not listed, including vocational (work related) as well as academic qualifications.

Please state .....

.....

20 If you left school without appropriate qualifications for University entrance and needed to return to education to obtain them, how long did it take? (You may have been involved in both full-time and part-time study).

FULL-TIME		PART-TIME	
1 year	.....	1 year	.....
2 years	.....	2 years	.....
3 years	.....	3 years	.....
4 years or more	.....	4 years or more	.....
Does not apply	.....	Does not apply	.....

SECTION 4 Advice, guidance, information and influences

This section asks questions about the sources of advice and guidance you used in arriving at your decision to apply for a university course and to apply to this University in particular. There are also some questions about the people and the reasons which influenced your decision.

1 From which of the following professional sources did you obtain advice and guidance which you felt to be of value to you in deciding to go into HE? . Please mark all of those appropriate.

Teachers at school	.....	Staff at the Advice Shop	.....
Careers guidance at school	.....	Staff at an advice centre	.....
College lecturers	.....	Staff at another University	.....
Careers officers	.....	Staff at a training organisation	.....
Staff at an Education Advice Centre	.....	Staff at a Job Centre	.....
Did not receive any advice that I found to be of any value	.....	I did not seek any advice or guidance	.....

Ohers not listed here. Please state .....

2 Who influenced your decision to apply for a University course by providing not only advice but also but also support and encouragement?

	Strongly supported	Supported	Not interested	Opposed	Strongly opposed	Did not apply
Mother	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Father	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Other family members	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Spouse or partner	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
College teaching staff	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Friend/s	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Careers officer	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Staff at educational advice centre	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Advice shop staff	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Staff at another University	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Job Centre staff	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Staff at a Benefit Office	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Employer	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Co-worker	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Teacher at school	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Members of a religious faith	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Members of a local community Organisation	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

Others not listed here. Please state .....

3 Why did you choose this University? You probably had more than one reason. Please mark all of those appropriate.

This University was my first choice	.....	I was impressed by the University facilities	.....
A recommendation from a former student	.....	I was impressed by the facilities for my subject area	.....
A recommendation from staff at school	.....	I was attracted by the flexibility of the course structures	.....
A recommendation from a careers officer	.....	The University is easily accessible from my home	.....
A recommendation from a college lecturer	.....	Accommodation was available to stay with relatives	.....
A recommendation from staff at a guidance centre	.....	Accommodation was available to stay with friends	.....
Staff at the Advice shop were helpful and encouraging	.....	I was able to obtain child care facilities	.....
I was impressed by the publicity materials offered	.....	None of these	.....

A factor not listed here. Please state .....

SECTION 5 Finance

Money is obviously a significant factor in making decisions on programmes of study. This section asks questions about how you managed to fund your education in the past and how you are funded now. To repeat the statement made in the introduction: this information will be held in confidence.

1 Which of the following sources of funding did you use to finance your education immediately prior to your University course, that is, while you were obtaining the qualifications for entry? You may have used more than one. Please mark all of those appropriate.

LEA statutory funding. (funding which the LEA must provide)	.....	Sponsorship	.....
LEA concessionary funding (funding which the LEA chooses	.....	Finance from school attended	.....
to provide from its own budget)	.....	Finance from college attended	.....
State Benefits (other than Family allowance)	.....	Self-financed from: full-time /part-time work	.....
Financed by parents	.....	Severance pay gratuity	.....
Financed by spouse or partner	.....	Question does not apply	.....
Financed by other members of family	.....		

Other source of finance not listed. Please state .....

2 Which of the following sources of funding are you now using to finance your University course? Again you may be using more than one. Please indicate all of them.

LEA statutory funding	.....	Financed by parents.	.....
LEA concessionary funding.	.....	Financed by spouse or partner	.....
State Benefits (excluding Child Benefit)	.....	Financed by other family members	.....
Finance from the University	.....	Student loan	.....
Self-financed	.....	Sponsorship	.....

Other source of finance not listed here. Please state .....

3 You may or may not have experienced difficulty in obtaining funding for your education prior to your University course.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Do not know
I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my education	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
I found it necessary to negotiate with various organisations in order to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Government Agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
My Local Authority was helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

4 You may or may not have experienced difficulty in obtaining funding for your University course.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Do not know
I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my course	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
I found it necessary to negotiate with various organisations in order to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Government Agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
My Local Authority was helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

5 I shall find it hard to complete my University course unless I can obtain additional funds. Yes ..... No .....

6 I shall need to find part-time work to "top up " existing funding. Yes ..... No .....

7 I shall not need to find part-time work. Yes ..... No .....

8 I expect to find difficulty in finding part-time work. Yes ..... No .....

SECTION 6 Accommodation

My current accommodation during my attendance at University is:

a)

In University campus accomodation	.....
In rented accommodation	.....
In owner occupied accommodation	.....
With my parents and immediate family	.....
With my spouse/partner	.....
With my spouse/partner and children	.....
With my children	.....
With my extended family	.....
Alone in lodgings	.....
Alone in a flat or similar	.....
In accommodation shared with other students	.....

In a form of accommodation not listed here. Please state .....

b) I am in accommodation separate from my immediate family during University attendance .....

Appendix 3. Pilot study

A. Procedure

The pilot study was conducted with 9 volunteer students from the B Ed Primary and Secondary courses. The students met in 3 groups in the Education Research Unit.

A draft version of the questionnaire was produced to include an explanation of the pilot study and to provide additional space at the end of each section for student comment.

At the commencement of each session the background to the study as a whole and the location of the questionnaire within this frame work was outlined to each group. The purpose of the pilot study was then explained. The students were asked to be critical and to draw attention to anything which seemed to them to be ambivalent, difficult to understand or an error.

The questionnaire was examined section by section. Students were asked to complete a section which was then analysed item by item in discussion. Students were offered the opportunity to ask questions or make comments verbally/and or to record them in the margin or in the space provided on the questionnaire. Notes were also made during discussion by the researcher.

The time taken to complete each section was recorded so that the amount of time required to complete the whole exercise could be assessed.

B. Queries, comments and responses.

Section 1. Course and personal details.

Query. Question 1.3 Awards
Should this include another question: Degree with Honours?
Response. This seemed to be an unnecessary additional category.

Query. Question 1.3 Main subjects
Students queried:
1. should this include education as a separate subject?
2. should there be a differentiation between "main" and "subsidiary" subjects?
3. they found the various forms of 'technology' confusing.

Response.
1. It was explained that all respondents would be studying an education course. However, since confusion had arisen it was agreed that an explanatory note would be included
2. The question be rewritten to include statutory subjects

3. After discussion it seemed probable that the format of the draft questionnaire was responsible for the confusion. Note was taken to look at the problem again when the final format was produced.

Query. Question 1.9 "cohabiting relationship"
This question was the centre of considerable debate. All of the students, both those who were married and those in other forms of relationship found the word 'cohabiting' unacceptable. Various alternatives were considered all of which had been discussed at length during the original formulation of the questionnaire.
Response
It was generally agreed that the wording needed to be changed. After some discussion "married or living with a partner" proved most acceptable.

Query. Question 1.10 "single with dependent relatives"
A number of students read this to mean dependent adults and to exclude children, particularly as the next question asked specifically about children.
Response.
Further consideration needed to be given to these two questions, probably be dividing them into two questions, 'adult' and 'children'

Section 2. Occupational background.

Query
Some students thought that the situation of some individuals, women in particular, who had worked full-time in the past but had left for family and child-rearing commitments needed clarification.
Response
Question to be added to cover this situation.

Query. Questions: 2.4, 2.5,2.7 which asked for a description of occupations in terms of social class.
As anticipated students were unable to respond to these questions though they had recognised the purpose for their inclusion. There was some discussion of the issues involved.
Response.
As had always seemed probable, delete these questions, ask for occupational titles, use occupational titles and draw categories from the Registrar General's information.

Query. Question 2.9
The students queried what was meant by the term 'unemployment' and why 'and in receipt of benefit' was added

Response.
It was explained that the aim of the question was to discover those who had figured on the unemployment register rather than those who were 'not working'. It was agreed that an explanatory note was needed.

Query. Questions 2.13 and 2.14
Some of the students did not know the meaning of ET. All recognised the meaning of YT.
Response
Reverse the position of the two questions, include an explanatory note on ET.

Section 3 Educational experience.

Query
Students found all of this section difficult particularly with reference to finding their way through it. There was considerable discussion within the groups during which the varied experience of the group members demonstrated the complexity and the range of variation of routes through the education system manifest in the student population. The routes available and the means of enabling students to find their way through the questionnaire rather than the content was the major difficulty. A number of alternatives and amendments were suggested.
Response.
Re-structure to try to ensure that individuals can clearly see and select those sections with which they need to be concerned

Query. Question 3.18 educational qualifications
A number of student thought that the emphasis was too heavily biased towards academic qualifications and that if a full picture of the range of qualifications possessed by the student body was to be gained then vocational qualifications should be included.
Response
Change the way in which the question is worded to include vocational qualifications and to encourage students to include these.

Section 4. Advice, guidance, influences.

Query. Questions 4.1, 4.2
1. Students thought that the difference between the two questions was not made clear. For example, they added 'parents' in the comments space 4.1 only to find 'parents' included in 4.2. They recognised the difference in the aims of the two sections only after they had completed them.
2. didn't make sense in terms of the response required
3. a number of students thought that 'friends' should be added as a category to 4.2
4. one student thought that both items were too long

Response
Change wording to make the difference between 'advice and guidance' and 'encouragement and support clear'
add 'friends' as a category in 4.2
the criticism was recognised but it was raised by only one student. Other members of the all groups recognised the value of the content of the question and did not feel that it presented problems to complete.

Section 5 Finance.

Query. Question 5.1
Students who had left and re-entered the education system, sometimes more than once, found this question difficult. The meaning of 'prior to your university course' was ambiguous. Again the major problem was the range of individual variation among students in the routes they had followed.
Response.
Change wording to clarify the period covered, that is, the period leading up to entry to university and add an explanatory note.

Query
Question 5.5

1. The students found this question to be ambiguous: did 'necessary' imply as a means of 'topping up' existing funding or in order to make a substantive contribution to available funding?
2. The students queried the availability of work: a number said that they would welcome the opportunity to work if they were able to find any.

Response.

1. Change wording to emphasise the period immediately prior to entry to university and add an explanatory statement.
2. Change structure to include two questions on need to work: one on 'topping up' and one on clearly stated 'need' to work
3. Add question on availability of work

Section 6 Accommodation

Query
This section produced a bi-polar response: one group found that it was too complicated to complete while the other two groups accepted it without query and, when asked stated that it presented no problem.
Response.
It seemed possible that the format of the question might have been at least a contributory factor to the response of the students. Reconsider the question structure and check the format in the final version of the questionnaire.

C. Comments

The involvement of the students in the research process and the contribution they made were invaluable, not only in the improvement of the questionnaire but also in the insight offered into the complexity and variation of their past experience. Their comments seem to indicate that the questionnaire includes appropriate areas at this stage in the study. That is, the students did not feel that substantial changes or additions to content were needed given that this is the first stage of the project. Discussion also indicated the possible value of the qualitative studies planned fro the later stages of the research.

Appendix 4.
(OHP slide. Presentation to students at data gathering)

STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

This questionnaire is the first part of a longitudinal study being carried out by the university in the School of Education over a three year period. The whole study will include a number of methodologies, qualitative and quantitative.

The need for the study has arisen from 2 main factors:-
a. there is a general lack of information on student experience; much research and writing has been concerned with institutions rather than students
b. in recent years a wider range of students with a greater variety of characteristics are accessing higher education via a variety of different routes

Universities therefore need additional information if they are to respond effectively to meeting student need.

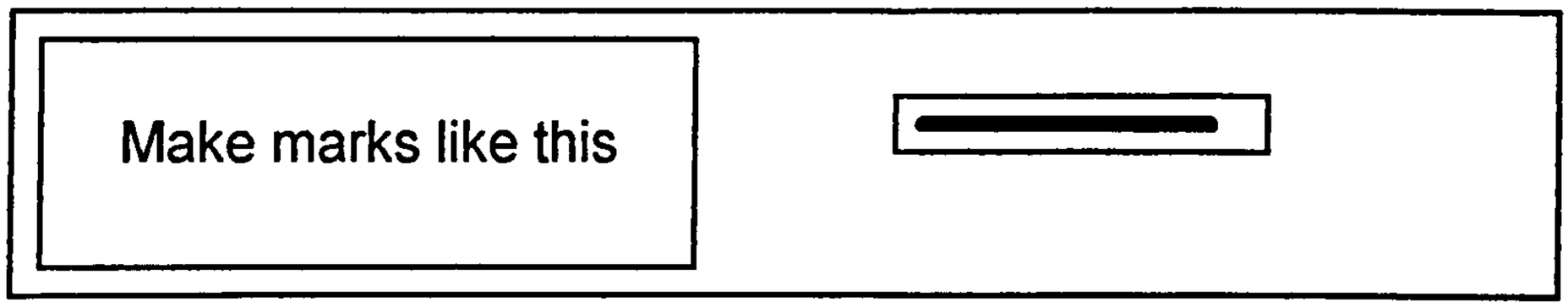
This element of the study is mainly concerned with your experience before you came to university and during the first semester of your course.

Appendix 5
(Completing an OMR form OHP slide. Used at data gathering.)

HOW TO FILL OUT AN OMR FORM

The OMR or Optical Mark Reader is a machine which picks up the marks made on an OMR form. It is important that the form is completed correctly so that the information will be recorded accurately.

Please read the questions carefully and record your response by making a mark in the appropriate box.



MISTAKES

If you make a mistake you can correct it by making it clear for the OMR Operator which mark was made in error e.g.

COMMENTS

If you have to write anything on the form do so in the space provided

Appendix 6 (a) Preparation for schools interviews and information for schools.

Four areas of preparation:
A. initial telephone contact
B. meeting with school staff including information package.
C. brief for participants, to be included in B. above.
D.explanatory document for school staff (Student Experiences of Higher Education),to be included in B above.

A. Initial telephone contact.
1. Aims.
1.1 to "sell" the study briefly but to a sufficient degree to obtain a meeting with the contact. The meeting is viewed as the main vehicle for attempting to obtain co-operation.

1.2 to provide
(i) a broad outline of content and aims sufficient to indicate that the study is worthwhile
(ii) to reassure the contact that the research and the researcher are bona fide
(iii) to avoid wasting the time of the contact and to avoid any indication that their time might be wasted in the future.

2. Call content.
2.1 self introduction -
name, member of staff of university (some indication of experience of teaching and management in schools and colleges, only if necessary and only sufficient to indicate some degree of professional standing in order to reassure the contact).
2.2 study content
The study is concerned with student experience prior to and during a programme of study in higher education - why they decided to go in to HE, when they arrived at the decision, what they expect university to be like, what they hope to achieve as a result of their course etc. The study is not about the school or student opinion of any particular institution, of teaching staff or of their course.
.(If necessary, in order to reassure contact include: the study is strictly concerned with educational issues and not with sex, drugs or any other social attitudes or social issues involving "teenagers" or young people)
2.3 characteristics of whole study
(i) "official" university research i.e. not a piece of individual research.
(ii) large study, 3 years duration, using different research methods, proposed co-operation comprises one part.
(iii) not a recruiting campaign for the university of Wolverhampton.
2.4 characteristics of the element in which co-operation is requested.
As a part of the wider study we wish to include evidence of the attitudes and opinions of young people in school sixth forms who are intending to go into

university in the near future i.e. second year sixth form students. In order to do this we wish to carry out and tape a group interview with approximately 10 students for about an hour. The tape will then be analysed. We have already carried out similar studies with mature students in colleges of FE and have obtained pleasing results.

2.5 Request an opportunity to visit the school and talk with the contact for about 30 minutes in order to provide more information, to deal with any queries they might have and to further discuss the possibility that they might be prepared to co-operate.

3.0

Hopefully arrange meeting.

B. Meeting with school staff (initial contact plus any others).

1. Aims.

to generate sufficient interest to encourage co-operation.
to further reassure the contact/s that the study and researcher are bona fide
to demonstrate that structure and professionalism has been involved in the study and in the preparation for this section of the work.
to demonstrate that a lot of work has already been carried out
to show the results of similar work carried out with Access students in FE.
to demonstrate an attempt to provide a structure for the discussion and its content in order to avoid wasting staff time

2. Information pack prepared beforehand, to leave with the contact so that they are fully informed and can deal with queries from other members of the school staff, pupils, parents etc... in the absence of the researcher. To include: explanatory document (D), copy of study structure, copy of brief for participants(C).

3. Meeting content.

3.1 Study aims, structure and content.
Diagram of study structure to provide general overview(already prepared: include in information pack) supportive verbal explanation of study and progress to date.

3.2 explanation of where the proposed element fits in.
samples of data from questionnaire, graphs etc... (not included in information pack)

3.3 Explanation of how group interview approach works, use of central microphone etc...
samples of data from Wulfrun in form of transcripts (not included in information pack)

4. Confidentiality

students must be volunteers, must have opportunity not to be involved
students will not be asked to give their names (examples from FE transcript data)

students will not be asked for any personal details or means of identification
the researcher will only collect data i.e. will not become involved in attempting to offer advice, comment or viewpoint, or in any way attempting to influence the views of the students.

Results.
A copy of the transcript and of the results following analysis will be made available to the school together with an opportunity to discuss the findings with a member of the research staff.

6. Requests
(I) quiet room for interviewing in which the students might be expected to feel reasonably relaxed
(ii) period of about an hour of actual interview time, a little more time will be needed for setting up briefing the students etc...
(iii) no more than 10 students (including male and female) who are in the second year sixth and are expecting to go into higher education

C. Interview: brief for participants. Verbal presentation. No written information will be given to participants.
(Main content and structure. Not intended to be presented verbatim).
1. Researcher's name, member of staff at University of Wolverhampton. (Who am I?)
2. Purpose. (Why am I here?)
Involved in a 3 year research study at the University which is concerned with higher education and in particular with students. Over recent years the population of higher education has changed and is continuing to change and to grow. In consequence universities need to know more about their students, the kind of people who are coming in to universities, why they come, what they are hoping to get while they are on a course and what they hope will result at the end.
3. Structure.(What are we going to do?)
I am going to ask for your views on higher education and your experiences as you have prepared to go into higher education. There are no right or wrong answers. What you give is your opinion or your experience. I haven't asked for your names and I don't intend to do so. There is no reason for you as an individual to be identified.
I shall tape record what we all say.
All I want you to do is to express your honest opinions and state your experiences of the issues I raise.

Interview content.
Coverage of 5 broad areas.
(NB. Question areas 1. and 2 may merge)
1. Staying on at school.
Why did you decide to stay on at school?

probing for:
when did they start to consider the decision, when did they arrive at the decision, who was involved, who did they perceive to be influential, who did they seek advice from, what sorts of things influenced the decision, did they consider any alternatives and what were they, had anyone else in the family stayed on at school?

2. Higher Education.
Why did you decide to go into university?
probing for:
when did they start to consider the decision, when did they arrive at the decision, who was involved, who did they perceive to be influential, who did they seek advice from, what sorts of things influenced the decision, did they consider any alternatives and what were they, had anyone in their family been to university, did they know anyone who had been to university?

3. Why did you choose a particular institution?
probing for:
factors which influenced their choice, what they took into account
e.g. the reputation of a particular institution(are students aware of a "league table" of HE institutions) facilities, a particular course, subjects, distance from home, social life, other factors

4. What do you think university will be like?
probing for:
views of university life, any feedback they have received, what their view of university is based on, fears and concerns(e.g. finance, coping with the work, coping with new people and new situations) sense of anticipation, what they hope to get out of university while they are there. Academic versus instrumental viewpoints (education "for its own sake" /education as a means to an end)

5. Aspirations
Where will you be in 5 years time?
probing for outcomes, in terms of what they hope to gain
their view of work and careers (evidence of positive or negative views of graduate employment)
evaluation of university experience and qualifications.

D. Student Experiences of Higher Education. (Prepared for the information pack for school staff)

Background.
In recent years higher education has been passing through a period of considerable change and evidence indicates that the student population is continuing to increase in size and also to change, for example, a wider age range with more varied experiences, more women and a greater proportion of students from ethnic minorities. Also students are gaining access by a variety of routes in addition to the "traditional" A-levels. This study is concerned with the characteristics of students and their experiences prior to and during a university course.

The study.
The study is structured (diagrammatic representation of structure attached) around first, a comparative and longtitudinal study of cohorts of full-time students within the Faculty of education and second, a consideration of two groups of potential students seeking access to higher education via either the A-level route from school sixth forms or via Access courses in FE as mature students.
A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is applied, questionnaires combined with group and individual interviews, in an attempt to obtain data in both width and depth.
The study has been in operation for two years.
The section of the study involving A- level students prior to entry to university interacts with data drawn from the questionnaires and from the individual interviews with students who have followed this "route" into higher education. This element of the research project is intended to provide not only additional information on the characteristics and experiences of students prior to entry but also views of university from the "outside", expectations of higher education, what respondents expect university to be like, and the aspirations of prospective students who will be applying for a wider range of programmes than those included in other parts of the study.

Method. Group Interview.
Students will be interviewed as a group by one researcher and the proceedings will be taped for transcription and analysis at a later stage.

Confidentiality
students should be volunteers: must have the opportunity not to be involved
students will not be asked to give their names or to provide any personal details or means of identification

General.
The study is not concerned with the school or student opinion of any particular institution, of their course or of teaching staff. The study is not a part of, or connected with, any recruiting exercise for the university. The subject matter of the interview will be restricted to educational matters only. The researcher will only collect data i.e. will not become involved in attempting to offer advice, comment or viewpoint, or in any way attempt to influence the views of the students.

Results.
A copy of the transcript and of the results following analysis will be made available to the school together with an opportunity to discuss the findings with a member of the research staff.

6. Requests
(I) quiet room for interviewing in which the students might be expected to feel reasonably relaxed

(ii) period of about an hour of actual interview time, a little more time will be needed for setting up briefing the students etc...
(iii) no more than 10 students (including male and female) who are in the second year sixth and are expecting to go into higher education

Appendix 6 (b) Information for schools
Research Project: Student Experiences of Higher Education.

Background.

In recent years higher education has been passing through a period of considerable change and evidence indicates that the student population is continuing to increase in size and also to change, for example, a wider range with more varied experiences, more women and a greater proportion of students from ethnic minorities. Also students are gaining access by a variety of routes in addition to the 'traditional' A-levels. This study is concerned with the characteristics of students and their experiences prior to and during a university course.

The study.

The study is structured around first, a comparative and longitudinal study of cohorts of full-time students within the Faculty of Education and second, a consideration of two groups of potential students seeking access to higher education via Access courses in FE as mature students.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is applied, questionnaires combined with group and individual interviews, in an attempt to obtain data in both width and depth.

The study has been in operation for 2 years.

The section of the study involving sixth form A-level students prior to entry to university interacts with data from drawn form the questionnaires and from the individual interviews with students who have followed this route into higher education. This element of the study is intended to provide not only additional information on the characteristics and experiences of students prior to entry but also views of university form the "outside", expectations of higher education, what respondents expect university to be like, and the aspirations of prospective students who will be applying for a wider range of programmes than those included in other parts of the study.

Method. Group Interview

Students will be interviewed as a group by one researcher and the proceedings will be taped for transcription and analysis at a later stage.

Confidentiality.

Students should be volunteers: must have the opportunity not to be involved.

Students will not be asked to give names or to provide any personal details or means of identification

General.

The study is not concerned with the school or student opinion of any particular institution, of their course or of teaching staff. The study is not part of, or connected with any recruiting drive on the part of the university. The subject matter of the interview will be restricted to educational matters only. The researcher will only collect data i.e. will not become involved in attempting to

offer information, advice, comment or viewpoint, or in any way attempt to influence the views of the students.

Results

A copy of the transcript and of the results following analysis will be made available to the school together with an opportunity to discuss the findings with a member of the research staff.

Requests.

1. a quiet room for interviewing in which students might be expected to feel reasonably relaxed
2. a period of about an hour of actual interview time, a little more time will be needed for setting up, briefing the students etc.
3. no more than 10 students (including male and female) who are in the second year sixth and are expecting to go to university

Group Interviews: "seating plans'
Access
Group A

Female, Black, 20s
Single parent
Former shop assistant
Wants to go into social work
A5

Female, Asian, 20s
Married
Former shop assistant
Wants to go into social work
A6

Male,White, 20s
ex-army
Wants to go into
finance/banking
A7

Female, Black, 20s
Former care assistant
Wnats to go into teaching
A4

Female,White
late 40s
housewife
unsure of career,
maybe teaching
A8

Female, White, 30s
Fmily
Wants to go into teaching
A3

Female, White, 40s
Divorced with children
Wants to work abroad
A2

Female, Black, 30s
former housing manager
single parent
A1

Group Interviews: 'seating plans'
Access
Group B

Female, Black.
No contribution.

White, Female, 40s
Office work. RSI
Wants to work in counselling
A3

White,
Female
no contribution

White, Male,
40s
A7

White, Female, 30s
Wants to go into teaching
A8

White, Male
40s
Disabled
Former occupation repetitive work
A1

White, Female,30s
Wants to go into teaching
A8

White, Female
40s
former nurse
A2

Female, Black
No contribution

White, Female, 30s
Office work
Uncertain about future
A4

White,male
no contribution

White, Female
no contribution

White,male,20s
Former soldier
Wants to be a psychologist
A6

Group Interviews: 'seating plans'
Access Group C

Female, White, 30s
married, children
Part-time work
Unsure of future
C1

Female, Asian, 20s
Unemployed for 2 years
Wants to do teaching
C2

Female,Asian,20s
Office work
Wants to go into
counselling
C3

Female,White,40s/50s
Family
Industrial
experience:former PA
wants to go into
careers guidance
C4

Female, White,20s
1 child
Redundant
Wants to go into
teaching
C5

Female,White,30s
Family
Wants to read science
Career uncertain
C6

Male, Black,20s
Part-time work
Wants to go into
leisure management
C7

Male,Asian,20s
Works nights
Wants to go into finance/
business
C8

Male, Asian,20s
Unemployed
Wants to read
economics
C9

Group Interviews: 'seating plans'
Access Group D

Male, White, 20s
Ex-engineering
Wants to go into computing
D3

Male, White, 30s/40s
ex-soldier
Wants to go into law or politics
D4

Female,White
20s/30s
Shopwork
Uncertain about future
D6

Male, White,20s
Careworker
Aspiring nurse
D6

Male, White, 40s
ex-engineering
uncertain about continuing
D1

Female, White, 30s
married, family
Trained in catering
Uncertain about future,probably teaching
D5

Female,White, 20s
Nursing auxiliary
Wants to do speech therapy
D7

Male, White, 20s
Careworker
epileptic
Wants to read history
D8

Group Interviews: 'seating plan'
School A
10/10/94

Female White Fine Art Teaching A.10	Female White Biology Forensic Science A.7	Female White Sports studies Physiotherapy A.2	Female Asian Biohemical Science A.6
Female White Sports Studies/ Geography Teaching A.5	Male White Transport Management A.1	Female Asian Pharmacology Pharmacist A.4	Female Asian Ophthalmics Optician A.3
		Male White Business systems A.9	Male White Law Solicitor A.8

Group Interview: 'seating plan'
School B
11/10/94

Male
White
English Literature
B5

Female
White
Law
B9

Female
White
Dentist
D1

Female
White
Fine Art
B7

Female
White
Sociology
B3

Female
White
Dance/
Geography
B2

Female
White
Art Foundation
B10

Male
White
Electronics
B6

Male
White
Physics
B4

Appendix 7(b)

Group Interviews: 'seating plan'
School C
7/12/94

Male
White
Leisure Studies
C9

Female
White
Maths
C10

Female
White
Law
C11

Male
White
Business
Studies
C12

Male
White
Engineering/
Communication
C7

Male
White
Hotel, Catering
and Institutional
Management
C1

Male
White
Accounting
C13

Male
Asian
Computer
studies
C3

Female
White
Teaching
C4

Male
Aian
Accounting
C2

Female
White
Teaching
C5

Female
White
Leisure
Studies
Teaching
C6

Female
White
Geography
C8

Group Interviews: 'seating plan'
School D
7/12/94

Male
Asian
Accountancy
D3

Male
Asian
Business
Studies
D6

Male
White
Economics
D5

Male
White
Media Studies
D4

Female
Asian
Politics
D7

Male
White
Fine Arts
D9

Female
Asian
Law
D8

Female
Asian
Psychology
D2

Male
White
Law
D1

Appendix 8.

Time taken to acquire qualifications for entry to higher education.

119 students had stated that they left school at statutory school leaving age, and therefore, without the qualifications required for university entrance. But only 42 students responded to the question on full-time study and only 38 to the question on part-time: 33 and 30 students respectively stated that the question did not apply to them while 170 and 177, respectively, ignored the question. A small number of students had studied both full and part- time.

Analysis by education routes indicates the poor response rate. For example, students following route B would have spent an additional 2 to 5 years in full-time education dependent on whether they left school with or without GCSEs. But only 3 of 29 students in the sample who followed this route responded. In addition responses showed a lack of consistency with other findings in the study. For example, students who followed Route E, and had stated elsewhere in the same section of the questionnaire that they had attended part-time day and/or evening classes, responded that this question did not apply to them.

Reasons for this result can only be speculative. A fault in the wording or format of the question such that students were not able to understand it, found it too complicated, too difficult or too time-consuming to answer, is a probability. The location of the question at the end of a long and complicated section and at the bottom of a page might also have been a contributory factor. There might also have been some confusion concerning leaving school and leaving full-time education. In addition, for some students who moved in and out of the education system and followed a number of different courses, the response might have been difficult to work out. The interaction between a number of these factors might have combined to discourage students from responding to the question.

Table 5.3:14 Time taken to acquire university entrance qualifications, Full-time, Full-time

route	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years or more	sub-total	did not apply	blanks	sample total
A	0	0	0	0	0	7	28	35
B	0	2	1	0	3	5	21	29
C	3	0	1	0	4	3	13	20
D	22	0	1	0	23	0	18	41
E	4	1	2	1	8	8	47	63
F	0	0	0	0	0	3	12	15
G	0	2	1	0	3	2	15	20
H	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	11
J	1	0	0	0	1	3	7	11
total	30	5	6	1	42	33	170	245

Table 5.3:15 Time taken to acquire university entrance qualifications. Full-time

	Part-time							
	years							
	1	2	3	4 or more	sub-total	did not apply	blanks	sample total
A	0	0	0	0	0	5	30	35
B	1	0	0	0	1	5	23	29
C	4	0	0	0	4	2	14	20
D	5	0	1	1	7	0	34	41
E	10	3	1	5	19	8	36	63
F	0	0	0	1	1	3	11	15
G	1	1	0	1	3	3	14	20
H	1	0	0	0	1	2	8	11
J	2	0	0	0	2	2	7	11
total	24	4	2	8	38	30	177	245

APPENDIX. 9 Section 4. Sources of advice, information and influences.

Table 12.2 Sources of influence: advice, guidance and encouragement. Routes A, B, C, J.

	Route A.			Route B			Route C.			Route J.		
	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot
mother	28	7	35	21	8	29	16	4	20	8	3	11
father	25	9	35	19	6	29	14	3	20	8	2	11
other family members	19	12	35	11	8	29	6	6	20	3	6	11
spouse or partner	3	6	35	7	3	29	5	0	20	0	2	11
college teaching staff	8	11	35	10	10	29	7	7	20	0	3	11
friends	18	12	35	11	13	29	13	3	20	2	5	11
Careers officer	8	12	35	6	8	29	5	3	20	2	2	11
staff ed advice centre	3	0	35	0	2	29	1	1	20	0	1	11
Advice shop staff	2	0	35	0	2	29	1	0	20	0	1	11
staff at another university	0	1	35	1	1	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
Job Centre staff	0	0	35	0	0	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
staff at Benefit Office	0	0	35	0	0	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
employer	1	0	35	3	1	29	1	0	20	1	3	11
co-worker	2	2	35	2	1	29	0	1	20	1	1	11
teacher at school	19	11	35	8	6	29	6	5	20	3	7	11
members religious faith	4	2	35	2	0	29	1	0	20	0	1	11
members of local community	2	1	35	3	0	29	0	0	20	0	0	11

Table 12.3 Sources of influence: advice, guidance and encouragement. Routes D, E, F, G

	Route D			Route E			Route F			Route G			Route H		
	st sup	sup	* tot	st sup	sup	* tot	st sup	sup	* tot	st sup	sup	* tot	st sup	sup	* tot
mother	13	8	41	24	22	63	4	3	15	11	5	20	6	3	11
father	11	7	41	19	16	63	2	4	15	10	4	20	5	4	11
other family members	7	11	41	14	17	63	0	8	15	5	8	20	1	2	11
spouse or partner	18	4	41	27	16	63	7	4	15	4	3	20	4	1	11
college teaching staff	16	12	41	10	11	63	1	0	15	4	4	20	0	1	11
friends	11	12	41	24	18	63	4	3	15	4	8	20	5	3	11
Careers officer	1	1	41	1	3	63	1	0	15	1	3	20	1	1	11
ed advice centre	2	1	41	3	1	63	1	0	15	1	0	20	1	2	11
Advice shop staff	1	2	41	2	3	63	0	1	15	0	1	20	2	1	11
another university	1	1	41	0	2	63	1	0	15	0	4	20	0	1	11
Job Centre staff	1	0	41	0	2	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11
staff at Benefit Office	1	0	41	0	0	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11
employer	1	0	41	2	5	63	0	1	15	1	2	20	1	2	11
co-worker	2	3	41	8	6	63	0	3	15	1	1	20	1	0	11
teacher at school	3	1	41	3	5	63	0	0	15	2	4	20	2	1	11
religious faith	2	0	41	2	2	63	1	1	15	1	0	20	0	0	11
local community	0	1	41	0	1	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11

* tot denotes total sample of students who followed this route.

Table 12.4 Sources of influence: advice, guidance and encouragement. Routes A, B, C, J.

	Route A.			Route B			Route C.			Route J.		
	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot	s.sup	sup	tot
mother	28	7	35	21	8	29	16	4	20	8	3	11
father	25	9	35	19	6	29	14	3	20	8	2	11
other family members	19	12	35	11	8	29	6	6	20	3	6	11
spouse or partner	3	6	35	7	3	29	5	0	20	0	2	11
college teaching staff	8	11	35	10	10	29	7	7	20	0	3	11
friends	18	12	35	11	13	29	13	3	20	2	5	11
Careers officer	8	12	35	6	8	29	5	3	20	2	2	11
staff ed advice centre	3	0	35	0	2	29	1	1	20	0	1	11
Advice shop staff	2	0	35	0	2	29	1	0	20	0	1	11
staff at another university	0	1	35	1	1	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
Job Centre staff	0	0	35	0	0	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
staff at Benefit Office	0	0	35	0	0	29	0	1	20	0	0	11
employer	1	0	35	3	1	29	1	0	20	1	3	11
co-worker	2	2	35	2	1	29	0	1	20	1	1	11
teacher at school	19	11	35	8	6	29	6	5	20	3	7	11
members religious faith	4	2	35	2	0	29	1	0	20	0	1	11
members of local community	2	1	35	3	0	29	0	0	20	0	0	11

Table 12.5 Sources of influence: advice, guidance and encouragement. Routes D, E, F, G

	Route D			Route E			Route F			Route G			Route H		
	st sup	sup	tot	st sup	sup	tot	st sup	sup	tot	st sup	sup	tot	st sup	sup	tot
mother	13	8	41	24	22	63	4	3	15	11	5	20	6	3	11
father	11	7	41	19	16	63	2	4	15	10	4	20	5	4	11
other family members	7	11	41	14	17	63	0	8	15	5	8	20	1	2	11
spouse or partner	18	4	41	27	16	63	7	4	15	4	3	20	4	1	11
college teaching staff	16	12	41	10	11	63	1	0	15	4	4	20	0	1	11
friends	11	12	41	24	18	63	4	3	15	4	8	20	5	3	11
Careers officer	1	1	41	1	3	63	1	0	15	1	3	20	1	1	11
ed advice centre	2	1	41	3	1	63	1	0	15	1	0	20	1	2	11
Advice shop staff	1	2	41	2	3	63	0	1	15	0	1	20	2	1	11
another university	1	1	41	0	2	63	1	0	15	0	4	20	0	1	11
Job Centre staff	1	0	41	0	2	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11
staff at Benefit Office	1	0	41	0	0	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11
employer	1	0	41	2	5	63	0	1	15	1	2	20	1	2	11
co-worker	2	3	41	8	6	63	0	3	15	1	1	20	1	0	11
teacher at school	3	1	41	3	5	63	0	0	15	2	4	20	2	1	11
religious faith	2	0	41	2	2	63	1	1	15	1	0	20	0	0	11
local community	0	1	41	0	1	63	0	0	15	0	0	20	0	0	11

*** tot denotes total sample of students who followed this route.**

Table 12.6 Sources of influence: advice, guidance and encouragement. Age groups 1.

	under 20			20 to 24			25 to 29			30 to 34			35 to 39		
	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot
mother	63	18	81	35	16	57	14	7	34	13	9	32	6	10	28
father	58	16	81	31	14	57	11	8	34	9	9	32	5	8	28
other family members	33	28	81	15	19	57	4	12	34	5	7	32	7	10	28
spouse or partner	13	8	81	15	10	57	9	5	34	14	6	32	16	9	28
college teaching staff	19	27	81	12	15	57	9	5	34	9	1	32	5	9	28
friends	36	32	81	21	15	57	11	11	34	11	8	32	10	9	28
Careers officer	18	22	81	5	7	57	1	3	34	1	1	32	0	1	28
ed advice centre	2	4	81	4	1	57	1	0	34	3	1	32	0	3	28
Advice shop staff	2	3	81	2	1	57	2	2	34	1	1	32	0	3	28
another university	1	3	81	0	4	57	1	2	34	1	0	32	0	1	28
Job Centre staff	0	1	81	0	1	57	0	0	34	1	0	32	0	0	28
staff at Benefit Office	0	1	81	0	0	57	0	0	34	1	0	32	0	0	28
employer	5	4	81	4	5	57	0	3	34	1	2	32	1	0	28
co-worker	4	5	81	7	6	57	0	5	34	3	2	32	3	0	28
teacher at school	33	27	81	8	8	57	2	2	34	3	1	32	0	2	28
religious faith	6	3	81	2	1	57	1	0	34	2	0	32	1	1	28
local community	4	1	81	1	0	57	0	1	34	0	1	32	0	0	28

* tot denotes total sample of students in this age group.

Table 12.7 Sources of influence: advice, guidance, and encouragement. Age groups 2.

	40 to 44			45 to 49			over 50		
	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot	st sup	sup	*tot
mother	2	1	10	0	1	7	0	1	2
father	1	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
other family members	2	0	10	1	2	7	0	0	2
spouse or partner	5	1	10	4	0	7	2	0	2
college teaching staff	2	1	10	0	0	7	1	1	2
friends	4	2	10	1	0	7	0	1	2
Careers officer	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
ed advice centre	0	0	10	1	0	7	1	0	2
Advice shop staff	0	1	10	0	0	7	1	0	2
another university	0	1	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
Job Centre staff	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	1	2
staff at Benefit Office	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
employer	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
co-worker	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
teacher at school	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2
religious faith	0	1	10	0	0	7	1	0	2
local community	0	0	10	0	0	7	0	0	2

* tot denotes total sample of students in this age group.

Table 12.9 "Not interested: Age Groups.

	under 20	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	over 50
mother	0	2	5	2	4	0	0	0
father	3	3	5	2	3	0	0	0
other family members	10	5	2	2	2	1	1	0
spouse or partner	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
college teaching staff	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
friends	5	4	2	1	2	0	0	0
Careers officer	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at educational advice centre	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Advice shop staff	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at another university	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job Centre staff	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at Benefit Office	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
employer	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
co-worker	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
teacher at school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of a religious faith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of local community	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12.10 Opposition by Education Routes 1.

	Route A.		Route B		Route C.		Route J.	
	opp	**strong opp**	**opp**	**strong opp**	**opp**	**strong opp**	**opp**	**strong opp**
mother	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
father	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
other family members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
spouse or partner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
college teaching staff	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
friends	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Careers officer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
staff at educational advice centre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Advice shop staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at another university	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job Centre staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at Benefit Office	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
employer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
co-worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
teacher at school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of a religious faith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of local community	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12.11 Opposition by Education Routes 2.

	Route D		Route E		Route F.		Route G		Route H	
	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp
mother	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
father	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
other family members	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
spouse or partner	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
college teaching staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
friends	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Careers officer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at educational advice centre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Advice shop staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at another university	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job Centre staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at Benefit Office	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
employer	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
co-worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
teacher at school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of a religious faith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of local community	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12.12 Opposition by Age Groups 1.

	under 20		20 to 24		25 to 29		30 to 34		35 to 39	
	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp
mother	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	0
father	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
other family members	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
spouse or partner	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	0
college teaching staff	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
friends	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Careers officer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at educational advice centre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Advice shop staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at another university	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job Centre staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at Benefit Office	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
employer	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
co-worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
teacher at school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of a religious faith	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of local community	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12.13 Opposition by Age Groups 2.

	40 to 44		45 to 49		over 50	
	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp	opp	strong opp
mother	0	0	0	0	0	0
father	0	0		0	0	0
other family members	0	0	0	0	0	0
spouse or partner	0	0	0	0	0	0
college teaching staff	0	0	0	0	0	0
friends	0	0	0	0	0	0
Careers officer	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at educational advice centre	0	0	0	0	0	0
Advice shop staff	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at another university	0	0	0	0	0	0
Job Centre staff	0	0	0	0	0	0
staff at Benefit Office	0	0	0	0	0	0
employer	0	0	0	0	0	0
co-worker	0	0	0	0	0	0
teacher at school	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of a religious faith	0	0	0	0	0	0
members of local community	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 12.14 Positive guidance, advice and encouragement. Gender. All Sample.

	female			male		
	strongly supported	supported	*total	strongly supported	supported	*total
mother	106	41	178	27	22	73
father	92	35	178	23	20	73
other family members	51	57	178	16	21	73
spouse or partner	54	29	178	24	10	73
college teaching staff	46	49	178	11	10	73
friends	72	57	178	22	21	73
Careers officer	24	22	178	1	12	73
staff at educational advice centre	9	9	178	3	0	73
Advice shop staff	7	9	178	1	2	73
staff at another university	2	7	178	1	4	73
Job Centre staff	1	3	178	0	0	73
staff at Benefit Office	1	1	178	0	0	73
employer	9	9	178	2	5	73
co-worker	12	11	178	5	7	73
teacher at school	39	29	178	7	11	73
members of a religious faith	10	2	178	3	4	73
members of local community	5	2	178	0	1	73

Table 12.15 Advice, guidance, information and influence: other

Categories	Responses
children's teachers	1
consultant	1
father worked at university	1
me	1
myself	1
nobody	1
private music teacher	1
student services	1
teachers at advice centre where I helped.	1

Appendix 10: Finance.

Section 5 of the questionnaire (Appendix 2) aimed to explore:

- the sources of funding used by students for their education immediately prior to entering higher education sources of funding for their current course
- the extent to which they had experienced difficulty in obtaining funding for both of these.
- student current and anticipated problems with finance.

Finance immediately prior to entry to university.

It was anticipated that students might have been involved in a variety of educational experiences over varying periods of time and might have used a number of sources to finance these. In order to avoid confusion students were asked to restrict their responses to sources of funding "immediately prior" to their current course.

Table App 10.1 Sources of funding prior to current course,

	Sources of funding	Responses
A	LEA statutory funding	93
B	LEA concessionary funding	17
C	State Benefits	19
D	Financed by parents	74
E	Financed by spouse partner	29
F	Financed by other members of the family	35
G	Sponsorship	3
H	Finance from school attended	0
I	Finance from college attended	41
J	Self-financed. Full-time work	28
K	Severance pay/ gratuity	14
L	Question does not apply.	14

Responses (Table App 10.1) shows that the students used a variety of sources and most used more than one, a funding 'package'. LEA statutory funding was the most significant source followed by funding from parents. Finance from colleges indicates the use made of the Access Fund and student hardship funds. Spouse and partner are also significant sources together with other members of the family and student self finance through employment. Smaller numbers of students used severance pay or gratuities to contribute to their funding. Only 3 received sponsorship and none received funding from school. Fourteen students responded that the question did not apply to them, either because they had an alternative source of funding not listed or chose not to answer the question.

The data recorded for the "direct entry" younger students (the 'under 20' age group and for education groups A, B, C and J) gives rise to a number of anomalies (Tables App 10.2 and 10.3). It was anticipated the primary sources of funding for these groups would have been the local authority together with their parents but student responses do not support this. Though the local authority and parents are

the main source of funding for the groups taken as a whole, only a proportion of the students, less than anticipated, list these alternatives. For example, 11 of 35 students following education route A, and 6 of 11 following route J. A number of possible explanations suggest themselves. It is possible that some of the students were educated in the private sector and therefore did not receive local authority finance for their education prior to university. This eventuality was not accounted for in the questionnaire. Some students may been without parents in which case their responses may have been recorded under 'other family members' or 'state benefits' for both prior and current programmes of study. It is also possible that the students may not have recognised the local authority as a source of funding for their 6th form or college education since no money actually changed hands. An alternative explanation is that some of the students were uncertain about sources of funding, that they were not aware that the local authority financed their education and that they did not recognise the fact that they were clothed, fed and housed by their parents as a 'source of funding'. In each of these situations no money was seen to change hands and there was no formal procedure involved. This alternative is supported by the attitudes of the 6th formers in the group interviews who had little understanding of funding and an expectation that parents would provide.

Table App 10.3
Sources of funding prior to university by age groups.

Funding Categories	under 20	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	over 50
A	35	25	13	7	8	1	3	1
B	5	5	3	1	2	1	0	0
C	1	4	4	6	4	0	0	0
D	45	18	7	3	0	0	1	0
E	2	3	4	4	12	2	2	0
F	13	5	6	5	3	3	0	0
G	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0
H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I	14	13	5	2	4	3	0	0
J	2	4	5	6	6	2	3	0
K	2	1	5	2	2	0	1	1
L	2	2	2	3	4	0	1	0
total	121	80	54	41	45	13	11	2
sample	81	57	34	32	28	10	7	2

Findings for the age groups beyond age 25 (Tables App 10.2, 10.3) and for education routes D, E, F, G, and H show variations in sources of funding. Parental financial support declines beyond the student age of 24 though it continues to be an element for some up to the age of 34 and for one student beyond the age of 45. The partner/spouse becomes more significant for students beyond the age of 35 and parents as a source of funding decline. Local authority funding continues to be significant, both statutory and concessionary, as does the contribution from colleges. Broadly four sources of finance have enabled 'mature' students to return to education: state funding via the local authorities, state benefits and the Access

Fund, the students own efforts through work, and the support of their families. The significance of each of these varied depending upon individual circumstances.

Table App 10.3
Sources of funding prior to entry to university by education routes.

Categories	Education Routes								
	A	B	C	J	D	E	F	G	H
A LEA statutory funding	11	17	8	6	15	14	6	8	4
B LEA concessionary funding	1	4	1	1	6	1	0	1	2
C State Benefits	0	1	11	0	11	5	0	1	0
D Financed by parents	24	15	0	4	5	7	0	7	0
E Financed by spouse/partner	1	0	3	1	14	11	0	0	1
F Financed by other members of family	5	3	0	2	11	8	0	0	1
G Sponsorship	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0
H Finance from school attended	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I Finance from college attended	4	7	5	1	7	13	2	2	1
J Self-financed. Full/part-time work	1	0	1	0	6	11	3	3	0
K Severance pay/ gratuity	1	0	1	0	1	6	1	1	3
total sample	35	29	20	11	41	63	15	20	11

Table Apps 10.4
Sources of funding prior to university by gender.

Categories	Female	Male
A LEA statutory funding	69	24
B LEA concessionary funding	15	2
C State Benefits	14	5
D Financed by parents	54	20
E Financed by spouse/partner	24	5
F Financed by other members of family	26	9
G Sponsorship	1	2
H Finance from school attended	0	0
I Finance from college attended	34	7
J Self-financed. Full/part-time work	10	18
K Severance pay/ gratuity	11	3
all sample	178	73

Findings for sources of finance prior to university show very little gender difference (Table Apps 10.4) Proportionately more men than women were self-funded from employment and proportionately more women than men used their spouse or partner as a source of funding. These results reflect the finding that men were more likely than women to have had employment experience and women were more likely than men to have experienced a break in employment to meet family commitments.

Students listed a small number of alternative sources of funding not included in the question (Table Apps 10.5). Responses did not suggest any significant omissions from the questionnaire item.

Table Apps 10.5
Other sources of funding not listed: prior to entry to university.

Source	number of responses
apprentice	1
child care payments	1
HTNT employment scheme	1
maintenance	1
part-time work	1
Saturday job	2
sponsorship from employer	1
total	8

Sources of funding: current course

Student sources of funding for the current course (Table Apps 10.6) are less in number and less complex than for education prior to university. The 'system' for finance for students in higher education is perhaps better organised than for education prior to entry. Sources fall into combinations of the same broad categories as for prior funding: local authority and state funding in the form of grants and loans, families, mainly parents and partners, and student own efforts.

Table 5.5:6
Sources of funding: current course

Categories	Number of responses
A. LEA statutory funding	226
B. LEA concessionary funding	25
C. State Benefits	5
D. finance from university	5
E. self-financed	38
F. financed by parents	60
G. financed by spouse/partner	30
H. financed by other family members	7
I. student loan	58
J. sponsorship	0

The additional sources cited by students (Table Apps 10.7) offer nothing to alter this pattern. The bursaries listed are made available to some of the students taking the Secondary Bed course as a course component (offered as an incentive to qualify to teach a 'shortage subject') and are therefore another form of state funding. The other contributions from students, apart from the pension resulting from the death of the father, are repetitions or expansions of areas covered in the question, mostly various forms of part-time employment.

Table Apps 10.7
Other sources of funding not listed: current course.

Categories	Number of responses
bursary	9
financed by ex-partner	1
holiday work	1
job	1
maintenance	1
overdrafts	1
part-time work	5
pension from father's death	1
Saturday job	1
weekend job	1
work	1

Table 10.8
Sources of funding: current course by age groups

Categories	Age groups							
	under 20	20to24	25to29	30to34	35to39	40to44	45to49	over50
A.	73	51	31	29	25	8	7	2
B.	16	5	1	1	2	0	0	0
C.	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0
D.	1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
E.	8	11	4	4	3	5	2	1
F.	41	15	2	2	0	0	0	0
G.	1	3	4	5	12	2	2	1
H.	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
I.	9	13	11	8	11	4	2	0
J.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
all sample	81	57	34	32	28	10	7	2

Analysis by age group (Table Apps 10.8) and by routes (Table Apps 10.9) shows that the category of 'financed by parents' again presents uncertainty in the same way as for finance prior to entry. There are more students who would be expected to be financed by parents in the sample as a whole than are represented in responses to this question. For example, there are 35 students who followed route A but only 19 indicate parental support. A similar pattern emerges for routes B, C and J.

There are a number of possible interpretations. First, that the students are in receipt of a maximum grant and no parental contributions would be recorded by the students, though they may be receiving financial support from their parents. Second the students may not regard parental contributions as an 'official' source of funding to be recorded in their responses. Third the students are not receiving support from their parents which, in the light of the other sources of funding they list, would suggest that some of the students are coping on a very restricted income.

Table Apps 10.9
Sources of funding: current course by education routes

Categories	Education routes								
	A	B	C	J	D	E	F	G	H
A. LEA statutory funding	30	27	18	10	39	56	15	17	9
B. LEA concessionary funding	7	5	3	3	3	1	0	1	2
C. State Benefits	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	0
D. finance from university	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	1
E. self-financed	6	2	1	0	6	16	3	3	1
F. financed by parents	19	14	10	6	3	2	0	6	0
G. financed by spouse/partner	1	0	1	0	10	7	5	0	3
H. financed by other family members	3	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
I. student loan	5	4	1	1	12	19	6	7	2
J. sponsorship	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
all sample	35	29	20	11	41	63	15	20	11

The students state elsewhere in the questionnaire that their parents are supportive and it is not possible to draw conclusions from the findings but it raises the issue of the extent to which parents meet their contribution to student funding.

Findings for gender (Table Apps 10.10) again show little variation.

Table Apps 10.10
Sources of funding: current course by gender

Categories	Female	Male
A. LEA statutory funding	158	68
B. LEA concessionary funding	22	3
C. State Benefits	3	2
D. finance from university	3	2
E. self-financed	22	16
F. financed by parents	44	16
G. financed by spouse/partner	21	9
H. financed by other family members	4	3
I. student loan	32	26
J. sponsorship	0	0
all sample	178	73

Difficulty in obtaining funding.

The two questions in this section covered the difficulties students might have experienced in obtaining funding for their educational experiences prior to university and for their current course. It was anticipated that the sample would include students with different characteristics and experiences who would have

obtained funding from different sources and through different processes. The questions were therefore designed to explore the difficulties they might have encountered in obtaining funding and the support and help made available to them from central and local government agencies. A "Lickert Scale" was used in an attempt to embrace as wide a range of information as possible. Students were given 4 positive statements to which to respond on a 6 point scale: from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' together with 'undecided' and 'do not know'. The same 4 statements were used both for experiences in obtaining funding prior to entry to university and for funding for the students' current course. Tables Apps 10.11 and 5.5:12 summarise the findings for the whole sample.

Table Apps 10.11
Obtaining funding prior to university: All sample.

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
no difficulty in obtaining funding	83	64	6	22	20	24	32	251
necessary to negotiate	5	17	7	30	30	56	106	251
Gov't agencies helpful/supportive	6	25	17	15	19	58	111	251
Local Authority helpful/supportive	25	47	16	16	17	41	89	251

Table Apps 10:12
Obtaining funding for current course.

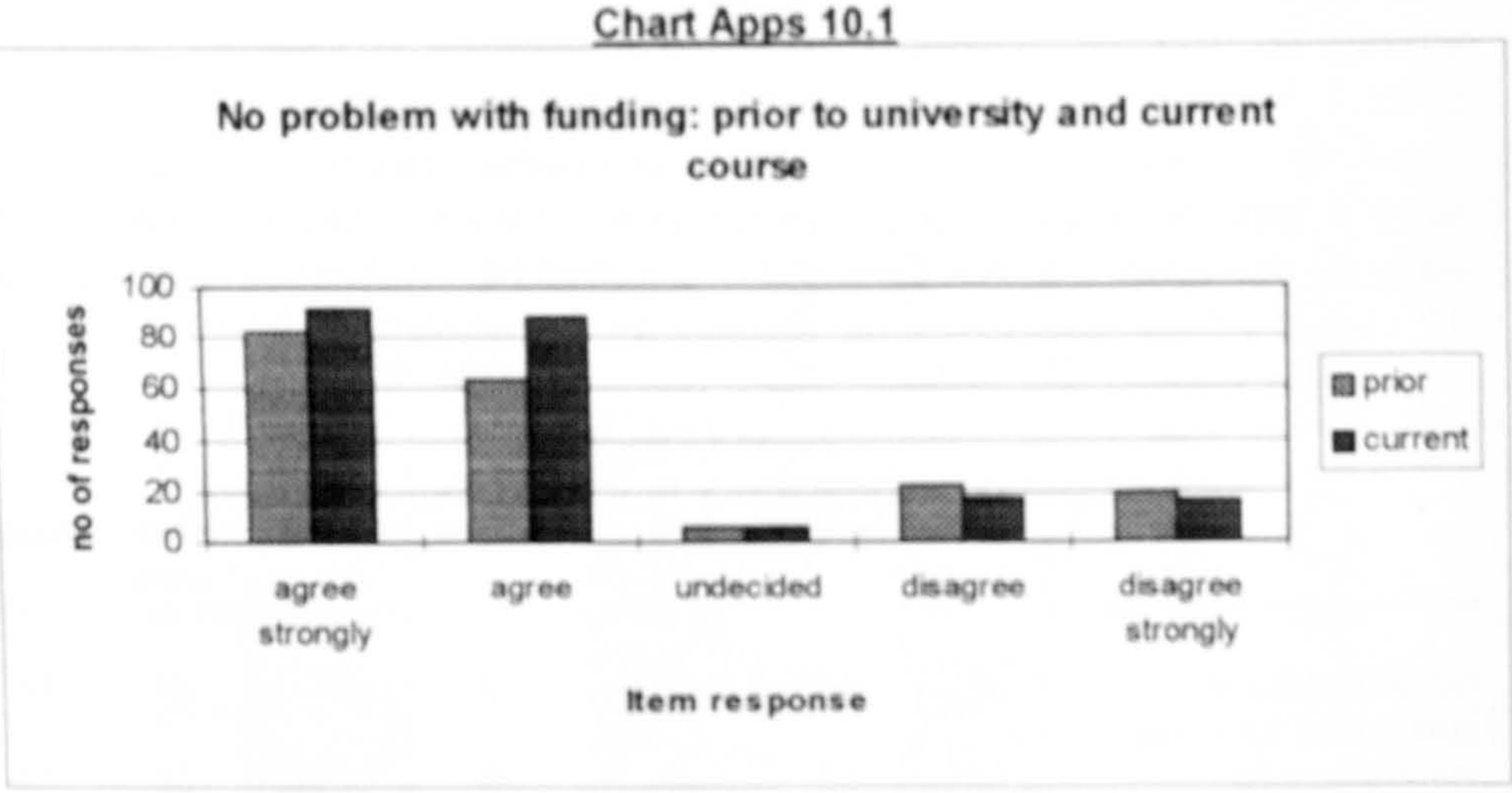
	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
no difficulty in obtaining funding	92	88	6	18	16	8	23	251
necessary to negotiate	8	14	11	32	33	45	108	251
Gov't agencies helpful/supportive	7	22	33	10	17	53	109	251
Local Authority helpful/supportive	37	63	28	21	14	16	72	251

The tables show that despite the inclusion of two alternative responses, 'undecided' and 'do not know' a number of students did not complete these items. They might have felt that the questions were intrusive or too complex, though this is not supported by the findings from the pilot study. The large number of non-responses to the second and third questions may be the result of a lack of student involvement with government agencies; some students may have dealt only with the local authority and have found little need for negotiation. This is supported by the large number of 'do not know' responses to these two items.

Analysis of difficulty in obtaining funding is dealt with first. The responses for funding prior to university and funding for the current course are presented and

compared in Chart Apps 10.1. They show a similar general pattern with the majority of the students obtaining funding with no difficulty or little difficulty but with funding for the current course easier than in the past.

Chart Apps 10.1



The evidence shows that prior to university 92 (33.1%) students "strongly agreed" with the statement and therefore had no difficulty in obtaining funding while a further 64 (35.1%) "agreed" suggesting that they obtained funding with little difficulty. Therefore a little over 70% of the sample were able to obtain funding without any major problems. However, 22 students (8.8%) "disagreed" and a further 20 "strongly" so suggesting that over 16% of the sample experienced significant difficulties in obtaining funding. With reference to funding for their current course over 70% of the sample (180) students "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement but again a smaller but significant minority (24 students, 10.2%) had difficulty in obtaining funding for their current course and a further 6 students had some problems. Taken as a whole sample therefore the findings indicate that the majority were able to obtain funding without major problems but a small, though significant minority, found it difficult to do so. Analysis by gender (Tables App 10.13, and 10.14)produced the same general pattern as for the whole sample and found little difference between male and female.

Table Apps 10.13.

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my education" (prior to university)

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
female	57	47	4	14	15	16	25	178
male	26	17	2	8	5	8	7	73

Table 10.14 Gender

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my course."

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
female	61	63	4	12	12	7	19	178
male	31	25	2	6	4	1	4	73

Analysis by age group (Table Apps 10.15, 10.16) again repeats the pattern for the sample as a whole for both prior experience and funding for the current course. No age group has experienced significantly more difficulties than any other though there are students in all but the 45 to 49 age group who had experienced problems.

Table Apps 10.15 Age groups

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my education" (prior to university)

Age Groups	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
under 20	28	21	2	8	3	11	8	81
20 to 24	16	22	0	3	5	6	5	57
25 to 29	9	7	3	3	4	4	4	34
30 to 34	15	7	0	2	3	2	3	32
35 to 39	8	6	1	3	3	1	6	28
40 to 44	4	0	0	1	2	0	3	10
45 to 49	3	0	0	2	0	0	2	7
over 50	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2

Table Apps 10.16. Age groups

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my course."

Age Groups	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
under 20	28	26	4	12	2	4	5	81
20 to 24	16	26	0	2	5	2	6	57
25 to 29	16	13	1	0	2	1	1	34
30 to 34	12	10	0	1	4	1	4	32
35 to 39	10	10	1	2	1	0	4	28
40 to 44	5	1	0	1	2	0	1	10
45 to 49	4	1	0	0	0	0	2	7
over 50	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

The findings from analysis by education routes (Tables Apps 10.17, 10.18) produce similar findings. All of the routes include a majority of students who had no problems together with a smaller number who had difficulties in obtaining funding.

Table Apps 10.17 Education Routes

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my education" (prior to university)

Route	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
A	13	8	0	5	1	5	3	35
B	9	11	1	1	2	4	1	29
C	8	4	1	2	1	2	2	20
J	4	3	0	1	0	0	3	11
D	15	7	3	4	6	2	4	41
E	14	17	1	6	7	6	12	63
F	5	4	0	0	2	2	2	15
G	9	5	0	2	1	2	1	20
H	5	3	0	1	0	0	2	11

Table Apps 10.18 Education Routes

"I experienced no difficulty in obtaining funding for my course."

Route	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
A	9	10	2	7	2	1	4	35
B	10	13	1	3	1	0	1	29
C	10	5	1	2	0	2	0	20
J	4	5	0	0	0	1	1	11
D	16	11	2	2	3	0	7	41
E	22	26	0	1	7	2	5	63
F	6	5	0	1	2	0	1	15
G	9	7	0	1	1	1	1	20
H	5	4	0	1	0	0	1	11

Necessary to negotiate to obtain funding.

Negotiation for funding was included on the assumption that the extent to which students found it necessary to negotiate with agencies constituted one measure of the extent to which they found funding difficult to obtain. The findings corresponded with the those for the question on difficulty in obtaining funding. A small percentage of the sample, 22 students or 8.8% for both prior and current education courses, found it necessary to negotiate to obtain funding.

Response of national and local government agencies.

It was argued that student efforts to obtain funding would be made easier or more difficult by the response of national and local agencies. Questions were included to take account of both of these for both prior and current study programmes.

The findings for national agencies for the whole sample (Table Apss 10.19) for prior and current funding are closely comparable producing a correlation of 0.98. Non-responses and 'do not know' responses account for 67.3% and 64.5% of the sample for prior and current funding respectively suggesting that for the majority of students national funding agencies were not relevant or created no significant problems. For a small though significant number, 8% to 10%, obtaining funding presented some difficulty.

Table App 10.19

"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding."

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
Prior	6	25	17	15	19	58	111	251
Current	7	22	33	10	17	53	109	251

The findings for gender (Table App 10.20) show little difference between male and female (correlation's 0.96 and 0.94 for prior and current funding respectively).

Table App 10.20

"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding."

Prior	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
female	5	21	10	11	13	38	80	178
male	1	4	7	4	6	20	31	73
total	6	25	17	15	19	58	111	251

Current	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
female	7	17	22	8	11	33	80	178
male	0	5	11	2	6	20	29	73
total	7	22	33	10	17	53	109	251

Table App10.21

"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding." (Prior)

Age Groups	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
under 20	2	10	7	4	5	25	28	81
20 to 24	1	5	2	3	5	15	26	57
25 to 29	0	2	4	2	2	7	17	34
30 to 34	1	3	3	1	2	6	16	32
35 to 39	2	4	1	3	4	2	12	28
40 to 44	0	1	0	0	2	1	6	10
45 to 49	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	7
over 50	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
total	6	25	17	15	20	57	111	251

The results for age groups (Tables Apps 10.21,10.22) produce the same pattern as for the sample as a whole with a majority producing non responses and the experiences of minorities varying in the same way.

Table App 10.22

"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding." (Current)

Age Groups	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
under 20	3	9	12	3	6	23	25	81
20 to 24	1	3	9	3	4	11	26	57
25 to 29	0	3	4	0	2	7	18	34
30 to 34	1	4	4	1	2	6	14	32
35 to 39	2	2	4	2	2	3	13	28
40 to 44	0	1	0	0	0	2	7	10
45 to 49	0	0	0	1	1	0	5	7
over 50	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
total	7	22	33	10	17	53	109	251

Findings for education routes (Tables App 10.23, 10.24) repeat the same pattern.

Table App 10.23
"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding." (Prior)

Routes	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
A	2	3	3	1	2	13	11	35
B	1	3	3	0	1	7	14	29
C	0	3	1	1	3	5	7	20
J	0	1	0	2	0	2	6	11
D	0	3	6	3	3	4	22	41
E	3	6	3	4	7	15	25	63
F	0	2	0	0	1	5	7	15
G	0	3	0	2	1	5	9	20
H	0	1	1	2	1	0	6	11
total	6	25	17	15	19	56	107	245

Table App 10.24
"Government agencies were helpful and supportive of my efforts to obtain funding." (Prior)

Routes	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree	do not know	blanks	total
A	2	3	7	1	5	10	7	35
B	1	2	3	1	0	6	16	29
C	1	3	2	1	2	4	7	20
J	0	1	0	0	0	6	4	11
D	1	4	6	1	2	4	23	41
E	2	5	8	2	6	13	27	63
F	0	2	2	0	1	4	6	15
G	0	2	3	2	1	3	9	20
H	1	1	1	2	0	1	5	11
total	8	23	32	10	17	51	104	245

Support from local authorities.

Evidence considered earlier indicates that local authorities were a major source of funding for students particularly for their current course. Despite this 51.7% of the sample either did not respond to the question or "did not know" for prior funding and 35.1% for their current course. Included among these respondents, therefore, there must be students who received funding from this source. These may include students whose application was dealt with by someone else (for example parents) or who experienced no difficulties with their application and therefore ignored the question. The "nil" responses must be regarded as favourable to the local authorities on the assumption that student who experienced difficulties or negative attitudes would have taken the opportunity to say so. The reduction in "nil" responses from prior to current financing corresponds with the greater number of students who used local authorities as a source for their current course. Positive responses were received by over 28% of the sample for prior courses and almost

40% for current study programmes which, taken together with the interpretation of "nil" responses, suggests that local authorities were largely supportive.

"Hard" to complete course without additional funding.

The findings thus far relate to ease or difficulty in obtaining funding but offer no contribution to the question of whether the funding once obtained was sufficient to meet student needs. This was explored by asking students whether they would find it "hard" to complete their university studies without additional funding. The word "hard" was chosen to indicate significant difficulty with finance.

The findings for the whole sample (Table App 10.25) show that almost 50% of the students were experiencing significant difficulty, 21% expected no difficulty and 31% gave no response to the question. These findings suggest that a significant number of students are experiencing and anticipate considerable difficulties with finance

Table App 10.25
"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds". All sample

	Responses	%
Yes	120	47.8
No	52	20.72
blanks	79	31.48
total	251	100

The findings for gender (Table App 10.26)show a greater proportion of women than men experiencing difficulties but the difference is small.

Table App 10.26
"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."
Gender

	yes	no	blanks	all sample	yes %
female	87	28	63	178	48.9
male	33	24	16	73	45.2
total	120	52	79	251	47.8

Findings for education routes and age groups (Tables App 10.27,28) show that members of all groups are having problems with funding and also in each group there are those who do not have significant difficulties. No single group emerges as experiencing significantly greater or lesser difficulty than any other. Results for the total of the "direct entry" groups, routes A, B, C and J comprising the younger age groups, show that 45.3% of the students experience significant difficulty with finance while the proportion for the other groups, routes D to H is 50.7%. This suggests that 'mature students' may have more difficulty than the younger age groups. Some support for this is found by comparing the groups aged under and

over 25. Of the former 44.2% experience difficulty while for the latter the proportion is 52.2%. Taking into account that the 20 to 24 group includes both independent students and those who are dependent upon their parents for funding the result can only be taken as an indication.

Table App 10.27

"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."

Education Routes

Route	yes	no	blanks	all sample
A	12	3	20	35
B	19	2	8	29
C	11	0	9	20
J	1	1	9	11
sub-total	43	6	46	95
D	27	7	7	41
E	31	16	16	63
F	5	9	1	15
G	8	9	3	20
H	5	1	5	11
sub-total	76	42	32	150
total	119	48	78	245

Table App 10.28

"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."

Age groups	yes	no	blanks	all sample
under 20	36	4	41	81
20 to 24	25	15	17	57
25 to 29	16	12	6	34
30 to 34	19	8	5	32
35 to 39	13	7	8	28
40 to 44	9	0	1	10
45 to 49	1	6	0	7
over 50	1	0	1	2
total	120	52	79	251

The indication of an age variation suggested that mature student with more responsibilities, particularly children, might have more problems with funding. This was explored (Table App 10.29). The findings show that students with children are more likely to have problems with funding than not, some 55% gave a 'yes' response, but not to a significantly greater extent than students in other groups in the sample.

Table App 10.29

"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."

Students with children.

yes	no	blanks	total
43	18	17	78

It seemed logical that social class might be a factor in student finance and responses were therefore compared with the social class of fathers and student own social class..

Table App 10.30
"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."
Fathers: Social class.

Social Class	yes	no	blanks	total
I	12	8	9	29
II	28	17	23	68
IIIM	41	18	19	78
IIINM	10	1	5	16
IV	6	2	4	12
V	1	0	1	2
total	98	46	61	205

For the social class of fathers (Table App 10.30) the results indicate that students in each group have difficulties with funding. There is evidence of a social class factor in that the proportion of students experiencing financial difficulties increases from 41% for fathers in social classes I and II to 52% in IIIM and to 62% in IIINM. The sample is too small to draw conclusions on this issue but are valid in suggesting that financial difficulties are not restricted to students from any particular social class group

Findings for student social class (Table App 10.31) again show that all categories, apart from the 3 students in social class I, experience financial difficulties and numbers are too small to draw any further conclusions.

Table App 10.31
"I shall find it hard to complete my university course unless I can obtain additional funds."
Student social class.

Social Class	yes	no	blanks	total
I	0	3	0	3
II	19	10	10	39
IIIM	13	5	6	24
IIINM	30	16	17	63
IV	5	2	6	13
V	0	0	0	0
NC	5	7	0	12
NR	48	9	40	97

Need for part-time work.

Two further factors related to student funding were considered: the extent to which students expected to need to do part-time work in order to 'top up' existing funding and how difficult they expected it to be to find such employment. The

extent to which students need to do part-time work is significant both in relation to their need for additional funding and also through its possible effects study time.

Table App 10.32
I shall need to find part-time work to "top up existing funding"

All sample	yes	no	blanks	total
	166	33	52	251
gender	**yes**	**no**	**blanks**	**total**
female	118	18	42	178
male	48	15	10	73
total	166	33	52	251

Findings for the whole sample (Table App 10.32) show that some 66% of students felt that they would need part-time work to "top up" the funding available to them and that the proportion of both women and men is comparable, 66.2% and 65.75% respectively. The pattern is similar to that found for difficulties with finance, but a larger proportion of students feel the need for part-time work which suggests that there are students who would benefit from more funding but do not expect to find it "hard" to cope without it.

Table App 10.33
"I shall need to find part-time work to "top up existing funding"

Age Groups	yes	no	blanks	total
under 20	57	2	22	81
20-24	39	7	11	57
25-29	21	9	4	34
30-34	22	5	5	32
35-39	15	5	8	28
40-44	9	0	1	10
45-49	2	4	1	7
over 50	1	1	0	2
total	166	33	52	251

Table App 10.34
"I shall need to find part-time work to "top up existing funding"

Routes	yes	no	blanks	total
A	24	0	11	35
B	19	2	8	29
C	14	0	6	20
J	9	0	2	11
D	27	4	10	41
E	44	12	7	63
F	8	7	0	15
G	13	3	4	20
H	6	1	4	11
total	164	29	52	245

The pattern for age and education route (Tables App 10.33, 10.34) is again similar to that for difficulties with funding. Some of the students in all of the groups

recognised a need for additional funding while a smaller group in each case stated that they will definitely not need to find part-time work.

The results for difficulty in finding part-time work(Table App 10.35) show that a large proportion of students expected that this would prove difficult. Some of those who replied "no" were known to be involved in part-time work at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Table App 10.35
"I expect to find difficulty in finding part-time work."

yes	no	blanks	total
124	37	90	251

Summary of finances section.

The sample is too small to provide reliable analytical conclusions or to indicate definite trends but valid broad indications can be drawn.

Students produce "packages" of funding from various sources dependent upon individual circumstances. Funding from "public sources' in particular the local authorities is significant though university students have clearly been removed from the benefit system. Families, particularly parents and spouses are significant.

A proportion of the students have no difficulty in obtaining finance, a larger group are able to find it, but a significant minority, some 8% to 10% of the sample, experience considerable difficulty. It is not possible from this study to determine the characteristics of this group. Though there is some indication of an age variation and some indication that women find it more difficult than men to obtain funding, there is insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions. It may be that the funding procedures currently in place discriminate against a particular category of people not found in this study because of the size of the sample or because the characteristics may not have been included. It may be that there is no pattern but that funding varies dependent upon the financial circumstances of particular individuals at a particular point in time.

The evidence suggests that funding was more difficult to obtain prior to entry to university than for the current course. This suggests that procedures for obtaining funding for continuing education are inefficient or that funding is inadequate. It also implies that some students may find it necessary to 'shop around' and negotiate in order to obtain funding. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that finance continues to be a barrier in access to post-school education, an element which might discourage or preclude access for some students. The lack of representation of social classes IV an V in the sample supports this.

It can be generalised from the results that, of this sample, a significant number, about half, will have difficulties with funding sufficient for them to find it "hard" to

complete their course on the income currently available to them. An additional group can cope on the funding available to them but would like part-time work to increase their income. A smaller number, some 30%, anticipate no difficulty with funding and do not expect to need to increase their income by part-time work. This evidence ,that 50% of the sample experience significant financial difficulty, is a source of concern. It implies not only financial hardship, sometimes for families, but also an effect on the time available to students to study and the negative effect on study capability which might result from financial worries. It might result in failure or in students obtaining a degree which does not reflect their ability. The problem will be exaggerated by the difficulty in obtaining work and the time spent in seeking it.

Appendix 11. Choice of institution.

Student selection of a particular higher education institution was explored in an item on the questionnaire and with the schools focus groups. The aim was to explore the extent to which attraction to a favoured institution influenced entry to higher education.

In relation to the process of deciding to enter higher education students in the questionnaire sample were asked why they decided to choose to attend this university (Appendix 2.p.4 Questionnaire Section 4. Question 3). The question was divided in to two parts. Students were asked first, whether the university was their first choice, they were then offered a variety of alternative reasons for attending this university, together with the option of selecting none of those offered and of stating other reasons not included in the list.

In total 107 (42.63%) students had made this university their first choice of higher education institution (Table App 11.1). Comparison of choice by gender shows more males than females making this choice but in each case over 40% of the sample did so.

Table App 11.1 This university as first choice: Gender,

	first choice	sample total	per cent
female	73	178	41.01
male	34	73	46.57
total	107	251	42.63

Analysis by course (Table App 11.2) shows some variation: the B Ed Secondary students are more likely than either of the other two to have made their course their first choice. This finding may, at least in part, result from the more specialist nature of the course which is offered in a limited number of institutions.

Table App 11.2 This university as first choice; Course,

Course	first choice	sample total	per cent
B Ed Primary	35	92	38.43
MODDS	22	70	31.42
B Ed Secondary	50	89	56.17
total	107	251	42.63

Evidence to suggests that the older the student the more likely they were to have made this university their first choice (Table App 11.3).

Table App 11.3 This university as first choice; Age groups

Age groups	first choice	sample total	per cent
under 20	27	81	33.3
20 to 24	24	57	42.1
25 to 29	15	34	44.1
30 to 34	12	32	37.5
35 to 39	19	28	67.8
40 to 44	3	10	30
45 to 49	5	7	71.4
over 50	2	2	100
total	170	251	42.63

The small numbers of students in the older groups makes comparison problematic but the suggestion of this trend is enhanced when the under 20 age group is compared with the total of those over 20. The percentage for the former is 33.3% while for the latter it is 47.05%.

Some support for this finding is provided by analysis by routes in to higher education (Table App 11.4). All of the routes show first choice selection by students at over 30% but, in general, those which are known to include a greater number of older students, D, E, F, G and H, include a higher percentage.

Table App 11.4 This university as first choice: Routes in to higher education.

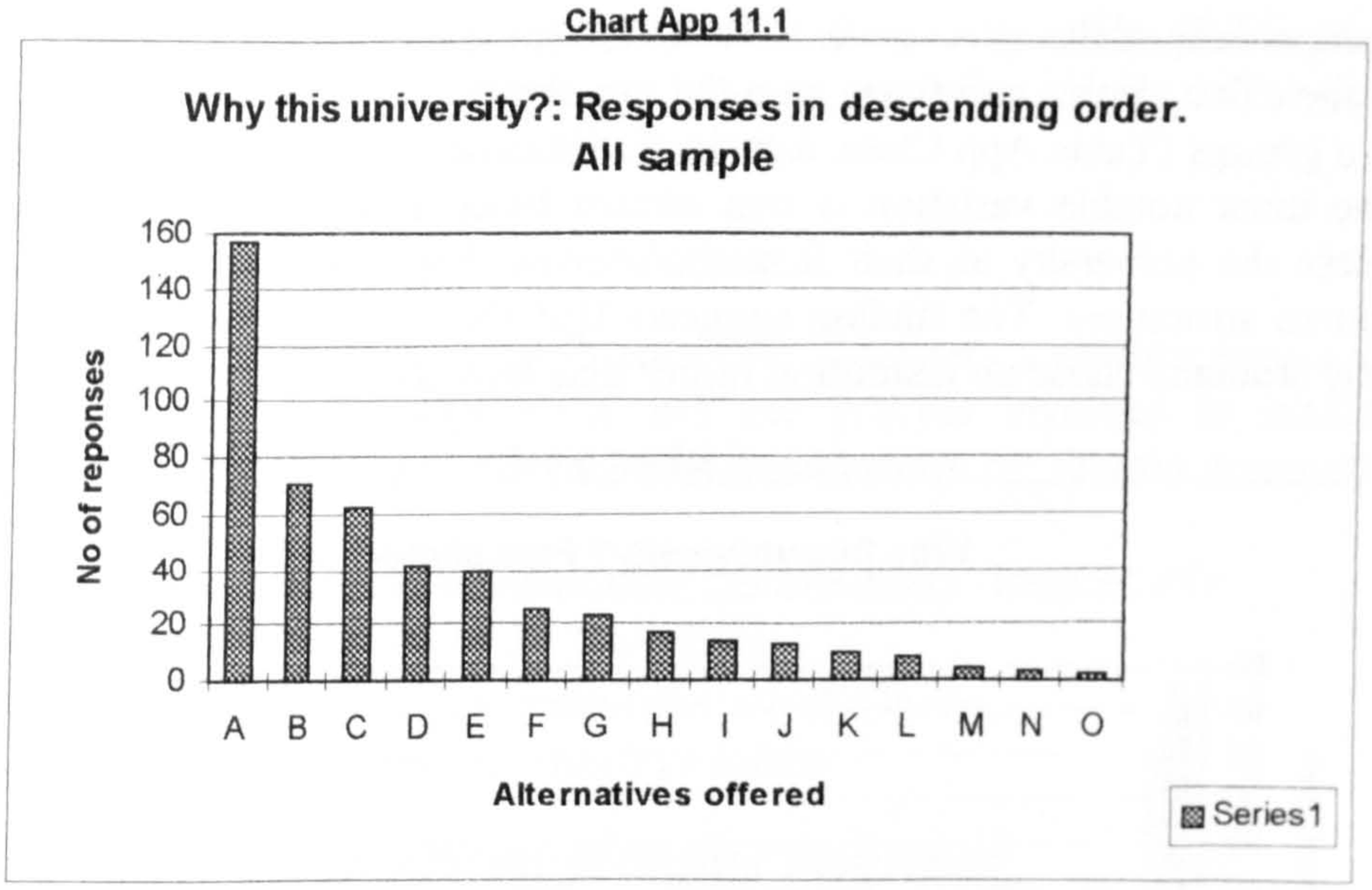
Education route	first choice	sample total	per cent
A	11	35	31.4
B	9	29	31.03
C	7	20	35
J	5	11	45.5
D	15	41	36.6
E	30	63	47.6
F	9	15	60
G	12	20	60
H	7	11	63.6
sub-total	105	245	42.9
* exclude	2	6	
total	107	251	42.63

Exploration of why the students chose this university included items from earlier questions on advice and guidance; recommendations from staff in educational institutions, schools and colleges, and from guidance centres. Items on university and course attributes and facilities were added The significance of accommodation and the geographical location of the university relative to the students' home were also included as influences on decision-making. Finally the informal effect of a recommendation from a former student was added. Findings for the whole sample are presented in descending order in Table App 11.5 and Chart App 11.1

Table 5.4:24 Why this university? All sample. Responses in descending order.

A	the university is easily accessible from my home	157
B	I was impressed by the facilities in my subject area	70
C	I was attracted by the flexibility of the course structures	62
D	I was impressed by the university facilities	42
E	a recommendation from a former student	40
F	I was impressed by the publicity materials	26
G	a recommendation from a college lecturer	24
H	staff at the advice shop were helpful and encouraging	17
I	accommodation was available to stay with relatives	14
J	a recommendation from staff at school	13
K	none of these	10
L	a recommendation from a careers officer	9
M	a recommendation from staff at a guidance centre	4
N	I was able to obtain child care facilities	3
O	accommodation was available to stay with friends	2

Chart App 11.1



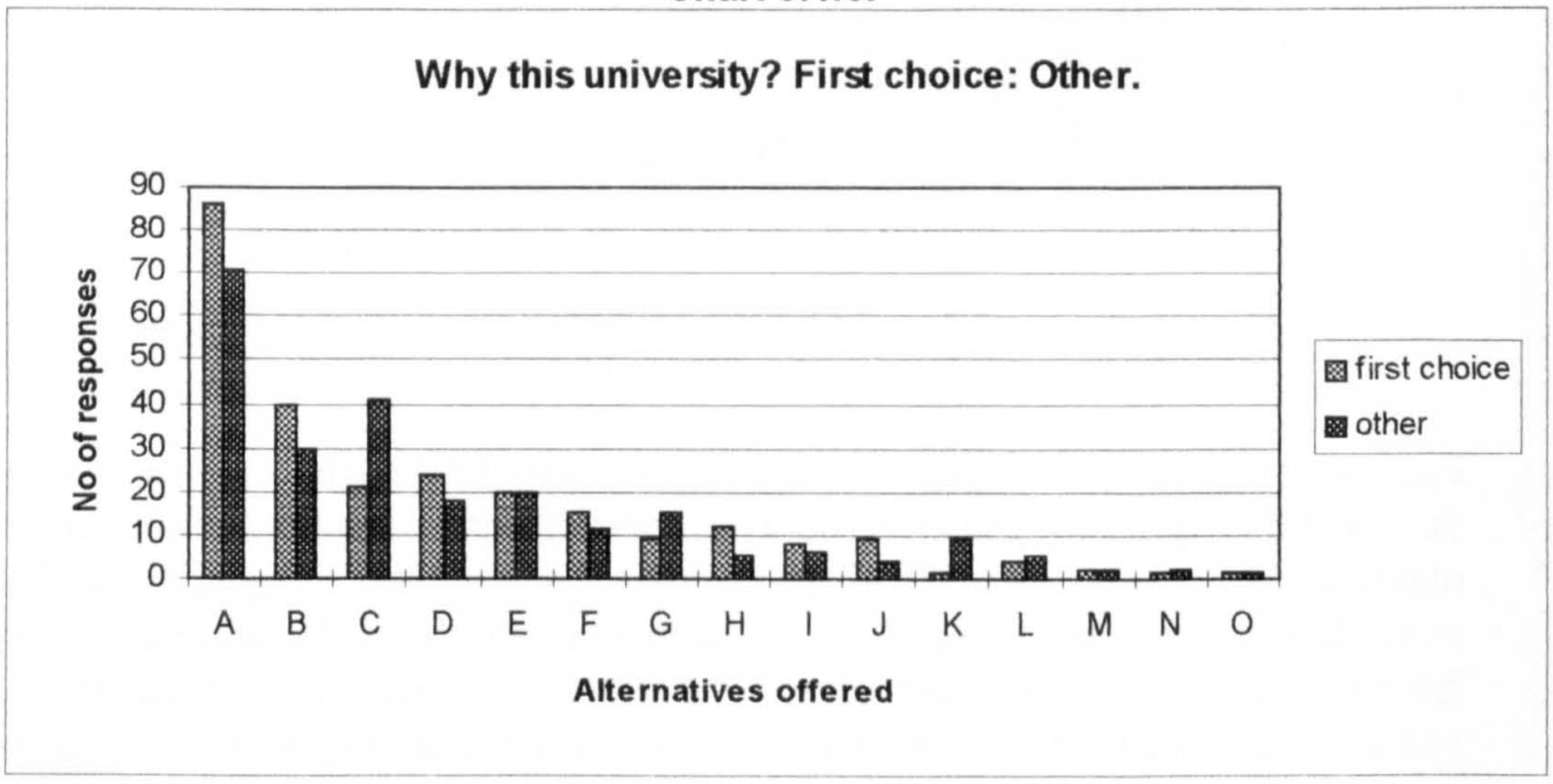
Ease of accessibility from home was a major factor influencing student choice. Of the whole sample 157 students (62.5%) gave this as a reason for choosing this university, over twice as many as the next largest response. Responses numbering more than 40, the next largest group, relate to attributes of the university. Course facilities and the flexibility of the modular course structures were both significant and more significant than university facilities in general suggesting that students were more interested in the course they wished to follow than the university as a whole. University publicity was less important. A recommendation from a former student was more significant than from any of the professionals listed. Only 3 students included child care facilities which was unexpected given the number of students known to have young children and that child care facilities were available in the university.

Table App 11.6 Why this university? First choice: Other

Alternatives offered.		first choice	other	total
university easily accessible from my home	A	86	71	157
I was impressed by the facilities in my subject area	B	40	30	70
I was attracted by the flexibility course structures	C	21	41	62
I was impressed by the university facilities	D	24	18	42
a recommendation from a former student	E	20	20	40
I was impressed by the publicity materials	F	15	11	26
a recommendation from a college lecturer	G	9	15	24
staff at the advice shop were helpful/ encouraging	H	12	5	17
accommodation available to stay with relatives	I	8	6	14
a recommendation from staff at school	J	9	4	13
none of these	K	1	9	10
a recommendation from a careers officer	L	4	5	9
a recommendation from staff at a guidance centre	M	2	2	4
I was able to obtain child care facilities	N	1	2	3
accommodation available to stay with friends	O	1	1	2

Comparison of the alternatives offered for students who applied to the university as their first choice and those who did not shows very little difference between the two groups (Table App Chart App 11.2). Responses produce a correlation of 0.93. The most notable variation is that almost twice as many of those who did not select the university as their first choice were impressed by the flexibility of the course structures. The finding suggests that the question is exploring aspects of why students chose an institution rather than how they arrived at their first choice.

Chart 5.4:3.



Analysis by gender (Table App 11.7) finds the same general pattern as for the sample as a whole. Responses correlate at 0.93. However 51 women as opposed to only 11 men were attracted by the flexibility of course structures suggesting that this approach appeals to women many of whom were known to have family commitments.

Table 5.4:26. Why this university? Gender.

Alternatives offered.	female	male
the university is easily accessible from my home	118	39
I was impressed by the facilities in my subject area	45	25
I was attracted by the flexibility of the course structures	51	11
I was impressed by the university facilities	27	15
a recommendation from a former student	30	10
I was impressed by the publicity materials	15	11
a recommendation from a college lecturer	15	9
staff at the advice shop were helpful and encouraging	14	3
accommodation was available to stay with relatives	10	4
a recommendation from staff at school	9	4
none of these	7	3
a recommendation from a careers officer	6	3
a recommendation from staff at a guidance centre	4	0
I was able to obtain child care facilities	3	0
accommodation was available to stay with friends	1	1

Analysis of student responses to factors not listed in the question (Table App 11.8 p.9) shows that most reiterate or enhance question items, for example, geographical location and course related factors.

Focus groups: choice of HE institution

This section sought to explore the factors which students took into account when selecting institutions for application and the process involved in making an application. With reference to the former a combination of factors emerged from the interviews:

- the perceived quality of the institution, the university "league table'.
- the geographical location of the institution
- the distance of the institution from the student's home
- the course which the student wished to follow

The reputation of institutions of higher education.

The students were not directly asked whether one institution of higher education was better than another but the question arose in three of the groups and was pursued. The students considered that there were disparities between institutions and courses but were uncertain of the basis for these. Though one student cited their careers teacher, sources of this information were largely unspecified seeming to emanate from general opinion or 'the grapevine'. They were aware that polytechnics had now become universities and that there was some difference in qualitative terms between Oxford and Cambridge, the traditional 'red brick' universities and the polytechnics but there was disagreement among the students on the relative merits of the institutions involved. The students as a whole, all three groups who discussed the issue, were uncertain about what was meant by the term 'red brick' and 'Oxbridge', Glasgow and Manchester were proffered as examples of the latter. Students also cited universities in 'the north' and in 'cities' as 'the best' and where they named universities these were mainly 'traditional', 'red brick' and they ignored the 'new' universities developed during the 1960s as a category. The students in Interview 1 accepted the 'league table' with Oxbridge at the apex and the polytechnics as inferior but groups 2 and 4 were less willing to recognise this. Oxbridge was seen to have the best reputation but was criticised for 'snobbishness', for being 'picky', for offering a narrow range of mainly 'traditional' courses and for accepting candidates more on the basis of entrance tests than examination results. Criticisms from group 2 were partly based on visits to Oxford and their fairly lengthy discussion was largely derogatory. Student knowledge of the higher education system as a whole seemed to be uncertain and based on hearsay, general impression and the personal experiences and viewpoints of known individuals, family members and friends, rather than more formal sources of information.

Geographical location.

Geographical location took two forms; distance away from the student's home and an area of the country which was perceived to be attractive. With reference to the former students fell into 3 groups (Table App 11.8), those who wanted to stay near to home, 'local' , those who wanted to go away but not too far, and those who wanted to go 'far, far way'. The 'near to home' group cited financial considerations and the familiarity of the environment as major considerations though course availability was also a factor. The second group wanted the perceived benefits of being away from home, as cited by the third group, but with the availability of support from home within relatively easy reach. The third group recognised their need to 'grow up', and saw freedom from home, independence and learning to survive as essential elements of the higher education experience.

Table App 11.8
Distance from home.

Near	advantages/ disadvantages	Far	advantages/ disadvantages
Wanted to stay local	Stories of people going away then homesick, coming home	I want to go far away, Cardiff or somewhere like that I want to go far, far away	
I wanted to stay close to home as well	Money is easier at home Comforts of home You know the area Parental support		Grow up more Get more freedom Learn to survive It's experience
Glasgow too far away			Feel smothered at home, never going to get independence
I have chosen the ones that are nearest home.			Get away from your parents (laughter) Independence I think you need to grow up
Didn't want to go far away, an hours journey from home Not too far, not too close	Easier to get home if you need something		

Near to, or away from home; advantages and disadvantages.

Interviewer. "What are the advantages of staying close to home then?"
"Money."
"Money. The comforts of home."
"I've got everything on a plate at home. I come in, there's my tea." "My mum makes my bed."
"You know the area."
"Parental support."

Interviewer. "What are the advantages of going away then."
"You grow up more and you get more freedom and ...."
"You learn to survive."
"It's experience."
"I want .... sometimes I feel smothered and I'm never going to get any independence at home."

"I think you need to grow up."
"Get away from your parents."
"Well, you go, you're away from home, you can do whatever you want. There's no one checking up on you. 'Why did you come in at 4 o'clock?' 'Because I did'. You don't get any of that."

Areas of the country.

The geographical location of institutions was also a factor in decision making. Some areas of the country were perceived to be more attractive than others, for example, the north was considered to have the better universities and to be cheaper and possessing of a 'nicer atmosphere' than the south. One student commenced his strategy for deciding where to apply by selecting areas of the country which he considered to be more attractive.

Interviewer. "You have all decided where you want to go. How did you decide which university you wanted to go to? How did you come to that decision?"
"First of all I decided which area I would like to go to in the country. Then I looked at all the universities in that area, read the prospectus thoroughly, found out as much as I could".
Interviewer. "You looked at areas of the country? Did anyone else do that?"
A number of responses. Yes.
Interviewer. "Which are the attractive areas of the country then?"
"The cities, London, Sheffield."
"North East or North West."
"Yes."
Interviewer. "Why north?"
"It's cheaper."
"Yes it's cheaper and, I don't know, the atmosphere is just nicer in the North."

Facilities and social life were also considered but these seem to have been of lesser significance than subject/course of study, geographical location and the reputation of the institution.

Limitations on choice.

A number of students found that their choice of university was limited by the course of study they wanted to follow.

Interviewer. "What about you because yours is fairly specialised isn't it, not many universities do they?"(ophthalmics)
"There's only 6 I can choose from."
"There weren't many that did the course I wanted (engineering and communication) to do, so I struggled to find some. So there's not much choice in universities."
"Yes, there's only 16 that do hotel management."
"Erm .... I was a bit surprised, it didn't seem very common (media studies). There was quite a few. I mean I chose my eight easy enough but it was less common than I thought."

Summary.

The results, from both the questionnaire and focus group samples suggest that choice of course in higher education rather than a specified institution was more important to students. The geographical location of institutions was also significant though for different reasons. Many of the younger students in the focus group sample linked distance from home with their view of higher education as a total experience (Chapter 13) offering the opportunity to learn to become independent and 'grow up'. Older students were more likely to seek entry to a 'local' institution so as to disrupt other aspects of their lives as little as possible. It seems probable therefore that choice of course among older students will be influenced by the availability in 'local' institutions. Finance was also found to be relevant. There is some evidence that both older and younger students are influenced in their choice of institution, and therefore course, by the reduced financial demands of living at home. There is therefore evidence of disparity in options between categories of student in choice of institution. Overall, however, the results suggest that entry to higher education is the primary consideration among students and choice of institution a secondary factor.

Table App 11.8. Why this university? Factors not listed in the question.

First choice		Not first choice	
Course related		***Course related***	
course covers working with special needs	1	offered place at short notice	1
only 6 such courses in the country	1	course required was available	1
shortened 2 year course	1	few universities offered desired course	1
		1 of only 2 universities where Spanish offered on B Ed	1
		university reputation in IT	1
		offered desired course	1
		two year course	1
		few exams	1
		financial incentives	1
Geographical location		***Geographical location***	
able to keep part-time job	1	wanted to stay at home	1
appropriate course available locally	1	most local offering course	1
can live at home	1	couldn't afford to go away from home	1
close to home	1	nearest degree course to home	1
local	1		
local to home	1		
Telford facility	1		
		no alternative	
		only offer	6
		offer through clearing	14
		no other choice	4
personal		***personal***	
age meant had to apply for shortage subject	1	second choice	1
		did not get grades for first choice	1
		second choice messed up on social work	1
		was led by God	1
		have children, most convenient	1
		just made redundant	1
		girlfriend came to same university	1
		children's needs	1
		changed mind on what I wanted to do	1
		changed mind on course	1
		university	
		good atmosphere	1
		this university had vacancies, others didn't	1
		offered unconditional entry	1
		majority of mature students	1
		spiral staircases	1

Appendix 12.

Discrimination in employment.

This question was included to explore the effects of discrimination in employment upon the student decisions to return to enter higher education. The response rate was low.

Of 158 students in the sample who offered an occupation the majority had not experienced discrimination. A further group did not respond to the question leaving 33 (20.88%) students who had experienced covert and 44(27.25%) overt discrimination (Table App 12.1). Some of these had experienced both overt and covert discrimination, and some on the basis of more than one of the grounds listed.

Table App 12.1 Experience of discrimination at work: all sample.

	overt	covert
no experience	89	78
no response	36	38
sub-total	125	114
whole sample (students who had experience of full-time employment)	158	158
experience of discrimination	33 (20.88%)	44 (27.85%)

Women experienced discrimination, both overt and covert, on the grounds of gender to a significantly greater extent than men. (Table App 12.2). Over 20% of the women on the sample had experienced discrimination either overt or covert compared with less than 4% of men.

Table App 12.2 Discrimination at work on the grounds of gender

	overt	%	covert	%	both	%	total sample
male	22	22.44	25	25.51	16	16.23	98
female	2	3.33	4.08	4	2	3.33	60

Age (Table App 12.3) was less significant as a discriminatory factor but was still experienced by up to 11% of the sample. There was little difference in terms of age and gender.

Table App 12.3 Discrimination at work on the grounds of age.

	overt	%	covert	%	both	%	total sample
male	9	9.18	10	10.20	6	6.12	98
female	7	11.66	9	15	7	11.66	60

The sample contained 7 students who were 'non-white'. Of these half had experienced overt, and 4 covert discrimination (Table App 12.4)

Table App 12.4 Discrimination at work on the grounds of race.

	overt	covert	
Asian	1	0	
Black Caribbean	1	2	
Indian	1	1	
Other	0	1	
White	3	2	
total	6	6	whole sample(non-white) 7

Results indicate that discrimination on the grounds of gender and age (Table App 12.5 annd 6) occurs across social classes. The variation between social classes mirrors the numbers found in the sample as a whole, for example, social class IINM includes the largest group of women in the sample and is the largest group shown to have experienced discrimination.

Table App 12.5 Experience of discrimination in employment. Social class: Gender.

social	overt		covert		both	
class	female	male	female	male	female	male
I	1	0	1	0	1	0
II	6	1	5	1	3	1
IIIM	1	0	2	0	1	0
IIINM	11	1	12	3	8	1
IV	2	0	2	0	2	0
V	0	0	0	0	0	0
HSWF	0	0	0	0	0	0
NR		0	0	0	0	0
NC	1	0	3	0	1	0
total	22	2	25	4	16	2

Table App 12.6 Experience of discrimination in employment. Social Class: Age: Gender.

social	overt		covert		both	
class	female	male	female	male	female	male
I	1	1	1	1	1	1
II	2	3	3	3	1	3
IIIM	1	1	0	1	0	1
IIINM	3	1	4	3	2	1
IV	1	0	1	0	1	0
V	0	0	0	0	0	0
HSWF	0	0	0	0	0	0
NC	1	0	0	0	1	1
NR	0	1	1	1	0	0
total	9	7	10	9	6	7

None- responses suggest an element of ambivalence in the response of the sample. This is to be expected from a group many of whom had not experienced full-time employment and were largely white and young.

The sample is too small for general conclusions to be draw with confidence. The findings show that women in this group had experienced discrimination while variations across the age groups suggest that it is not reducing. It is notable that the same student from Social Class I who had experienced discrimination on the grounds of both age and gender was a young woman, '20 to 24' age group, who was a graduate production engineer, following the Secondary B Ed course. The extent to which her decision to enter teaching, rather than pursue the 'non-traditional' female occupation for which she had qualified, was influenced by the discrimination she experienced is a matter for speculation. The addition of a question on the effect of discrimination on the decision of students to enter higher education might have added value to the results.

Appendix 13: Accommodation.

Questionnaire Section 6 included two questions which were intended to gather information on the kind of accommodation in which students were living during attendance at university, with whom they shared this accommodation and whether they were separated from their families during term time. The aim was to explore differences in accommodation between the 'traditional' and 'new' student groups.

As a result of flaws in the format the first questions in this section drew an unsatisfactory response. It is possible to draw some general indications but detailed conclusions are not available from the data. General findings for the whole sample (Table App 13.1) show that students were most likely to be accommodated either on the university campus or with their families: their parents or their spouse/ partner. A small number lived alone or shared accommodation, off campus, with other students.

Table App 13.1 Accommodation during attendance at university.

Type of accommodation	responses
in university campus accommodation	52
in owner occupied accommodation	35
with my parents and immediate family	73
with my spouse/partner	43
with my spouse, partner and children	32
with my children	19
with my extended family	1
alone in lodgings	4
alone in flat or similar	5
in accommodation shared with other students	5
in accommodation separate from my family during term time	61

Table App 13.2. accommodation type: age groups.

Accommodation type	Age groups							
	under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	over 50
university campus	31	15	4	1	0	0	1	0
in rented	5	12	7	10	1	0	0	0
owner occupied	2	4	6	7	13	3	1	1
with parents/family	41	24	3	4	1	0	0	0
with spouse/partner	0	6	6	9	13	3	4	1
spouse/partner/children	0	1	4	7	12	3	3	2
with children	0	0	8	4	4	3	0	0
extended family	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
alone/lodgings	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
alone/flat	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0
shared with other students	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	81	64	43	45	45	12	9	4
all sample	*81*	*57*	*34*	*32*	*28*	*10*	*7*	*2*

Changes in type of accommodation varied in accordance with age groups (Table App 13.2). Younger students, under the age of 30, were more likely to be living with their parents and family while older students lived with their spouse/partner and children. This pattern is also reflected in education routes(Table App 13.3). Students who followed routes A, B, C and J were living on campus or with their parents, or sharing with other students. Those who followed routes D, E, F or H were more likely to be living with their spouse/ partner and children.

Table App 13.3 Accommodation type: education routes.

Accommodation type	A	B	C	J	D	E	F	G	H	total
university campus	15	9	6	4	3	6	1	7	1	52
in rented	3	3	1	1	8	11	2	3	0	32
owner occupied	3	0	0	0	7	14	6	2	1	33
with parents/ family	13	17	12	5	3	11	3	4	5	73
spouse partner	0	0	0	0	15	13	4	4	3	39
spouse/partner/children	0	0	0	0	9	18	2	2	0	31
with children	0	0	0	0	12	4	1	0	2	19
with extended family	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
alone/ lodgings	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
alone/flat	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	5
shared with other students	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
total	35	29	20	11	60	84	19	24	12	294
all sample	*35*	*29*	*20*	*11*	*41*	*63*	*15*	*20*	*11*	*245*

The question on separation from the family during university attendance was included to provide support for the question on distance from home in student choice of university (Section 4, question 3) and also to explore whether 'mature' students were leaving their families to attend courses. Results (Table App 13.4) again indicate a variation in accordance with age. Students under the age of 30 were more likely to be separated from their families. Of the 61 students in the sample who responded to the question only 6 were married of living with a partner and only 1(a man, aged between 45 and 49, living on campus) had children.

Table App 13.4 Separated from immediate family during university attendance

Age groups	Responses
under 20	26
20 to 24	21
25 to 29	9
30 to 34	4
35 to 39	0
40 to 44	0
45 to 49	1
over 50	0

The findings show that only 62 (24 %) of the sample were living in accommodation usually associated with the 'traditional' student (on campus, in a flat or lodgings or in accommodation shared with other students). The majority of

the sample were living with their parents or their families; they were 'day' rather than 'residential' students.

The question format precludes any more detailed findings. The format presented respondents with too many alternatives so that the aim of obtaining more detailed information on where students where living and with whom was lost. The information should have been requested in the form of two different questions so that cross referencing would have been possible.

Appendix 14
Access students. "Thumbnail biographies."

Some Access students offered sufficient information in their contributions to make it possible to produce 'thumbnail biographies'. These serves to further enhance the diversity of experience found among the sample.

Student A2.

A white woman estimated to be in her 40s. She 'passed the 11 plus and went to Grammar school where she was very unhappy. She lost contact with her former friends and, she felt, was unable to make new ones as a result of her working class background. She felt that there was pressure from the school to succeed academically but a lack of support from home. Her response to this situation was rebellious and she became "anti everything". It is unclear whether she stayed on into the sixth form but it seems unlikely that she achieved A-level success.

She married had children and became involved in business activities which do not seem to have been successful. She divorced and retained custody of her children. Prior to entering the Access course she had been living on state benefits supplemented by the "black economy": unofficial childminding and generally "being there" to help people out. She had experienced financial difficulties during the course and admitted to living "close to the bone" and had difficulty justifying the necessary financial outlay on travel, meals and books.

She presented as combative and was more critical than other students: she was the only student to be critical of college teaching staff, of siting the course in an annexe, of a lack of communication among Access students and of "academia" for encouraging a narrow view of life and over-specialisation. She seemed strongly committed to success on the course (her children and relationships had been consigned to the "back boiler" and she admitted finding the work "addictive") and to higher education which she saw as a "way back" form past trauma. She hoped to be able to work abroad after completing her degree studies but her view of the future was less than optimistic: she would not believe that she was in university until she was "sitting in" her "first class", she feared graduate unemployment and recognised that after completing a degree course she might be "the same as I am now", that is, in the same situation.

Student B2.

White, female estimated to be in her 40s at the time of the interview. An only child she had entered nursing without A-levels after leaving school mainly to please her parents who saw nursing as a "nice job for their little girl". Though she enjoyed the work, which she found to be distinctly unglamorous, it was not what she wanted to do and she left it when she married. She felt that she should have stayed on at

school and gone to university. She married and had children (one son was in university at the time of the interview), but she felt that her life was then controlled by the demands of her husband and family. She had come to live in Wolverhampton, for example, not because she wanted to but in response to her husband's work. She had decided to take an Access course for herself, "for me", in an attempt to feel that she had a degree of control over her own life. She saw university as offering the "permission" to read and to study which had been denied to her in the past. She was uncertain about a future career apart from "using my degree" to work "helping people".

Student A5.

A black woman estimated to be in her twenties at the time of interview. She succeeded in obtaining a place in a selective school but chose not to accept it preferring to stay with her "friends" and move to a local comprehensive. Her parents particularly her father were anxious for her to succeed in education but lacked the knowledge to provide the support she needed. Staying on at school and going to university was not considered an option at school and she left and went to work. At some stage she worked as a shop assistant. She later became a single parent. Her parents supported her decision to take the Access course and were delighted with her success. She always felt that university was not for people like herself, expected that she would "stick out like a sore thumb" when she commenced her degree studies but felt that if "they" could do it so could she. She hoped to find a job related to social work but not the "kind of social worker that knocked on people's doors".

Student C4.

White woman estimated to be in her 40s at the time of interview. She had wanted to stay on into the sixth form at statutory school leaving age but was prevented from doing so by her parents because she was female. Her brother had been allowed to stay on. She left school and went into employment in which she had some success, working as a personal assistant before leaving to raise a family. Her mother's negative attitude towards education had continued: she believed that her daughter should be at work assisting her husband by contributing to the family income rather than "playing" at the Access course. The student hoped to use the experience she had gained in commerce by working as a careers officer.

Student C1.

White woman estimated to be in her 30s at the time of the interview. She did not stay on at school but felt that at the time she had the ability to succeed. The attractions of her social life, "boys" and "staying out late" distracted her from educational concerns. She left school and later married and had three children. She started to take evening classes to find an outlet which provided something in that

was not connected with her husband and family. She was successful at GCSE level and was intending to take A-levels when the tutor in the FE college suggested that an Access course might be more appropriate "at her age". The course had produced changes in her attitudes by encouraging interests outside the mundane activities associated with running a home. Her husband had taken more family responsibilities as opposed to his former expectation of relaxation outside work. She was still unsure about the kind of work she wanted to do after university. She was doing part-time work at the time of interview and had dons so throughout her course.

Student D5.

A woman estimated to be in her thirties at the time of interview. She had never felt that she was "very clever" at school and had left to take vocational training in catering. She had worked in the hotel and catering industry in a variety of jobs prior to marriage and a family. Her husband had recently taken a B Ed course to supplement his Cert Ed and was very supportive of her decision to take an Access course. She felt that she was now capable of studying to degree level but was uncertain about what career she wanted to pursue. Initially she had wanted to teach but was now less certain given the range of opportunities available. She thought that she would probably take a degree course and keep her options open.

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